



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, June 26, 2019

Day 20

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,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)  
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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)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)  
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),  
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP),  
Government Whip  
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Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UCP)  
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Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)  
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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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Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UCP)  
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UCP)  
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)  
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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)  
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, Edmonton-South West (UCP)  
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),  
Deputy Government House Leader

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Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)  
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UCP)  
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre  
(UCP), Government House Leader  
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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)  
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Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UCP)  
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Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UCP),  
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Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)  
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UCP)  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),  
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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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Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Children's Services
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Muhammad Yaseen	Parliamentary Secretary of Immigration

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

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Getson  
Glasgo  
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Nielsen

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Reid  
Rowswell  
Stephan  
Toor

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

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Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

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

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

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Gray  
Lovely  
Nixon, Jeremy  
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Shepherd  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Sweet

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Sweet  
Williams

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

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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

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

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Dach  
Feehan  
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Rosin  
Sabir  
Schmidt  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Singh  
Smith  
Turton  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 26, 2019

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Good evening, everyone.

I'll take a moment and say hello to my daughter, Molly, who is tuned in this evening to watch our proceedings. Hi, Molly.

Now you may all take a seat.

### Government Bills and Orders

#### Second Reading

##### Bill 12

##### Royalty Guarantee Act

[Debate adjourned June 26: Mr. Nielsen speaking]

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

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good evening to you and all the thousands of viewers that are probably watching us here intently debating Bill 12 at this time. When we had left off, I was just concluding some remarks a little bit around red tape and how I felt that there was a concern on my part around maybe a potential rush by the government to feel that they would need to reduce a lot of red tape because of some of the red tape that they have been introducing, part of which I think Bill 12 might be doing here.

I didn't want to . . . [interjections]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, can we just keep the volume down a little bit so I can hear our speaker? Thank you.

Hon. member, please proceed.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. That's twice now that we've had to quiet down the folks here.

I wanted to quickly touch just a little bit on some of the work that was done around the royalty review by the former NDP government, with just a couple of quick quotes that I would like to go through.

When we started this process we committed to listening to Albertans and industry. Seeing our recommendations brought to life means Albertans can know their views are reflected in the Modernized Royalty Framework. This is a system that is built to last and I'm pleased to see the positive reaction to it.

Of course, that was said by Dave Mowat, the president and CEO of ATB Financial and the past chair of the royalty review advisory panel.

I'd also like to quote Tim McMillan, the president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. He said:

I commend the Alberta government for its timely approach to create a more modern royalty system through a constructive process. This has led to a royalty system that is true to the principles of the royalty advisory report. The new royalty system helps provide more clarity that investors need to plan for the future.

And one other quick one that I just wanted to touch on:

The Explorers and Producers Association of Canada is pleased that the conclusion of this royalty calibration process will allow investors and oil and gas producers to move forward with a clear understanding of the new royalty and fiscal terms. The well-run process allowed the thorough exchange of analysis and information between government and industry. The result is a modernized royalty framework, with more transparency and better suited to support investment and development of Alberta's future energy resource opportunities.

Of course, that was Gary Leach, president of the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada.

What I am essentially saying, Madam Speaker, is that the system we have in place currently works. It's providing certainty for investors within the industry. It's providing certainty for our businesses that take our resources and bring those to market, providing a fair and balanced return to Albertans. I think Bill 12 will upset that applecart, and that is doing a little bit of a disservice to Albertans.

Unfortunately, as some members are probably expecting, I won't be supporting Bill 12. I still feel that, you know, this is potentially going to create a bit of a race to reduce red tape, as we've seen. There are many bills that are coming forward that are creating a whole bunch of red tape, which is a little bit counterproductive to one of the platform commitments that the government brought forward.

With that, though, I will take my seat. I'm interested to hear the rest of the debate of this going forward, and I look forward to some of the comments that I'm sure we'll be hearing.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers?

Would the hon. Minister of Energy like to close debate?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

##### Bill 8

##### Education Amendment Act, 2019

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

Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be not now read a second time 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.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment June 25: Ms Ganley]

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Madam Speaker, I would like to move the following unanimous consent motion to go to one-minute bells for the duration of the evening, including in Committee of the Whole. I will seek the table's advice if we've accomplished my objective or if I need to say it differently.

[Unanimous consent denied]

**The Deputy Speaker:** We are now on Bill 8. Are there any speakers wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on Bill 8 here this evening. We know that we've heard a lot of issues around Bill 8 in regard to ensuring safe and caring schools. Quite frankly, I should know because I was the Minister of Education and looking for ways by which we could build a cohesive safe and caring schools policy for students here in the province of Alberta. I was around when Bill 10 was being debated as well, so part of the evolution, the time unfolding around these issues. I was both witness to and partly the architect of these events. I can speak on good authority and give some practical history as to why it was necessary to strengthen the School Act, Bill 10, and safe and caring schools in order to make sure the integrity

of GSAs and QSAs was retained and they were allowed to flourish here in the province of Alberta.

When I became minister and was watching with interest GSAs and QSAs starting up in the province of Alberta, I did notice that there was a lot of inconsistency. I was getting a lot of feedback and complaints from students, individual schools, parents, and so forth where certain things were happening that would help to slow down the timely creation of GSAs and QSAs in schools and, you know, somehow dilute the purpose of the GSA and the QSA in the first place. I mean, there are a myriad of reasons why that might have been happening. I don't want to judge or generalize about what the motives or the intentions were around those events happening, but, I mean, I can tell you that they were definitely happening.

For example, a common challenge that we ran across with building GSAs or QSAs is that an individual administrator at a school would simply drag their feet. You know, perhaps it was a grade 11 student or a grade 12 student in their school that was looking to form a GSA or a QSA and sponsor that, and we saw circumstances where an administrator would simply kind of drag their feet and wait for that student to graduate or leave the school, looking at it not as an opportunity to create something special in the school and to help vulnerable kids but treating it as a problem and maybe treating it like the individual that was advocating for the GSA was a problem. The administrator would rag the puck or not move in a timely fashion, and there would be a lot of frustration associated with that.

7:40

We were talking about kids that are, like, 15, 16, 17 years old, so when the full force of an administrator at a school comes forward and is obviously obfuscating and getting in the way, then that's really hard for a young person, and often the GSA or the QSA just didn't happen, and the kid might move schools or, like I say, would graduate and be gone in the interim.

Another common problem that I was trying to mediate and work with was that administrators would say: "Okay. You want to start a GSA or a QSA. That's fine, but you can't call it that. You know, we just don't want that kind of language around, so you can call it a culture club, or you can call it an inclusion club or a rainbow club." I had a couple of those along the way, and the kids said: "No, we want to call it . . ." – and maybe they do. Maybe some kids do want to have a different name, culture club or whatever, but not allowing students to actually use "gay-straight alliance" or "queer-straight alliance," really, was an issue quite a lot in different schools around the province. Again, I was making a list of practical things that were happening that needed to change in order to strengthen the legislation and to make it whole.

Another common issue that we ran across – again, you know, this is a sensitive one, but it's very key to the integrity of a GSA – is that students could join the GSA and retain the confidentiality of that if they chose to do so. Again, you know, it's sensitive, and I know that people opposed to GSAs and QSAs really struck on this point as being a reason to fight against gay-straight alliances and queer-straight alliances, but it's sort of the essence of what those groups are. It's a safe place for a young person who is just coming to terms with their sexuality.

Maybe it's only a temporal thing, like they're just saying: "Okay. I need to have this place, and it needs to be on the q.t. that I am joining onto this because I need to think about this." It's a very sensitive time in a person's life. I was just listening to the radio driving over here, and it was a podcast on CBC talking about LGBTQ issues and about people choosing to come out to their family and friends. It's not easy to do, by any means, and the GSA

or QSA model is a place to create a safe space and a safe haven for people, and then they can make choices around that later, right?

I mean, it's important to realize and to know that the legislation as it stands now, which is very strong, very cohesive legislation, still doesn't override the law in regard to safety, imminent danger, and social services as well. It's not as though the GSA legislation would retain the confidentiality of someone even if their life was in danger or if there was something that was deemed to be so by social services and so forth, but it retains the confidentiality if a student chooses to have that confidentiality within certain parameters. Again, eminently reasonable, and any suggestion that students should be compelled to release that information to anyone in any normal circumstance is just not logical. Like I say, it undermines the whole reason and purpose of a GSA and a QSA in the first place.

By making those simple adjustments, you know, we saw the phenomenon where GSAs and QSAs were beginning to flourish across the province. It was quite obvious that there was a need and an interest in these groups in schools because they just started to proliferate at quite an astounding rate.

Another phenomenon that I saw over time, over the last three years now, I guess, is that school boards started to come onboard in regard to creating a safe and caring schools policy that was in keeping with a certain standard. I mean, I definitely had lots of foot-dragging for the first couple of years, but, you know, at the end of the day, we stood with every single public school in the province of Alberta in putting together a coherent and acceptable and often outstanding safe and caring schools policy that was completely in compliance with the law.

We had every single Catholic school board in the province of Alberta build a safe and caring schools policy that was in compliance with the law and was truly outstanding and had infused and threaded through it articles of faith – right? – because, of course, that's the prerogative and, I think, the importance of our Catholic school system, to have faith-based teaching. And they did it, every single Catholic school board. In other words, every Catholic school in Alberta was under a safe and caring schools policy that was coherent, that was sensitive, that was infused with faith. That went really well. I mean, I think we can be very proud of that, to see that work. I can tell you that it wasn't easy, by any means, but – you know what? – sometimes the very best, most important things in life are not easy to achieve. We did manage to put that together, and I was very proud of that.

Every single francophone school and school board, again, has a safe and caring schools policy that is coherent, that is sensitive, and completely in compliance with the law. As I mentioned, I think, the other night, I have to take the account of people that can translate for me because I can't read their policies, but they passed with flying colours, and I'm very proud of them as well.

Every single school in terms of charter schools, again, building a safe and caring schools policy in compliance with the law and often doing a very outstanding job and meeting the local needs as well to build in language that would meet the articles of the charter that that school happened to be under: that turned out really well, and I was very proud of the work that they did as well.

The vast majority, Madam Speaker – the vast majority – of private schools here in the province of Alberta undertook the same exercise and came up with a safe and caring schools policy that was outstanding, quite frankly. They did a great job, and I was very proud to see what was produced. You know, I think that that whole aspect of this journey that we've been on around gay-straight alliances here in the province of Alberta was extremely rewarding to see, by far the vast majority of schools, 90-some per cent or more – I can't remember what it was – going through this process in an authentic and genuine way and coming up with something that they

can be proud of. I mean, it's as simple as that in terms of the history of where we are today.

You know, I know that the government is trying to sell these changes to safe and caring schools policies as just being something inconsequential and so forth, but obviously it's not because, number one, we just went through that whole process of coming up to the level that we're standing at here today. We're at a place where we literally have moved people's minds and understanding about this whole issue around inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ people in general, not just students, in our society.

I will say, Madam Speaker, that I was a person that travelled on that journey over the last three years as well, gaining understanding of not just sort of something on paper or some basic idea around justice and equality but a true understanding of inclusivity and acceptance that, you know, I internalized in everything that I do. I feel like I'm a stronger person for it. I'm a more understanding person for it. I think as well that literally hundreds of thousands of other people had gained some useful knowledge and understanding about this issue as well. You could literally see Alberta moving from a place where we were before to a more caring and accepting and inclusive place for all of us to live, so I think that we need to look at that as part of what we have done here today and where we're going in the future as well.

7:50

I think that those who know me know that I am a reasonable person that looks for ways by which we can collaborate to create something that we can all live with and that still will demonstrate progress in terms of anything that we debate here in this Legislature. You know, with this one, this particular Bill 8, I think that we all need to take a long, hard look at what is the purpose of the legislation in the first place, go back to those first principles, make sure that every aspect of that is built in a cohesive way to ensure that we are looking after vulnerable youth, that we are instilling a sense of justice and equality into the policies that we put forward in regard to LGBTQ issues and with GSAs and QSAs specifically, and that we're retaining a sense of safety and security for people as well.

By this being on the docket, so to speak, Madam Speaker, up for debate here, it literally has shattered the level of security and confidence that we did create over this last number of years because people say: "Why are we changing this? I mean, what's the point? Why is it that we should be feeling compelled to make a change when we have gone through so much work to build coherent policy, have allowed GSAs and QSAs to flourish, and have allowed that process to start?" I just know that people are feeling insecure.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any speakers under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I would not want to put you in a spot where I was moving the same unanimous consent motion, but as you well know, I'm always here to help – it's my main goal each day when I come here – so I'm going to try this in a different way. I'm going to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 32(2) and (3) to go to one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening, which, just so you know and for those following at home, would mean both in and outside of committee.

**The Deputy Speaker:** That would be the House deciding on a procedural amendment, so we will seek unanimous consent to waive the standing orders.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anybody else on the amendment?

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

**The Deputy Speaker:** We're back on the main bill. Are there any other speakers to the bill?

Would the hon. minister like to close debate?

**Member LaGrange:** Yes, I will close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

## Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

### Bill 12 Royalty Guarantee Act

**The Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill?

**Mrs. Savage:** Madam Chair, Bill 12, Royalty Guarantee Act, is a very important step towards strengthening investor confidence in our province's oil and gas sector. This act would provide long-term certainty to those making investment decisions by affirming that the current royalty structure will be maintained for at least 10 years. This guarantee is also one of our platform promises and demonstrates our commitment to stand up for our energy sector and create more jobs for Albertans.

Madam Chair, Alberta went through two royalty reviews, in 2008 and in 2016, and those reviews told us what we already knew, that royalty rates in Alberta are competitive with other jurisdictions, including Saskatchewan and many U.S. states. However, these reviews also fundamentally altered how investors viewed Alberta. Before these reviews took place, our province was viewed as a stable place to make long-term investments, which brought prosperity and investment to Alberta, but these two royalty reviews created a climate of uncertainty and unpredictability, which impacted how investors viewed Alberta, and have had a profound negative impact on our province's ability to compete. As a result, investors started leaving our province in search of other jurisdictions with a more stable investment climate. Unfortunately, this kind of uncertainty has contributed to our province losing billions of dollars in investment opportunities, and we still have not recovered.

This trend of investors wondering what curveballs might be thrown their way has to stop. Industry needs certainty. The Royalty Guarantee Act will help restore Alberta's competitive advantage. This guarantee is a major step towards assuring investors that Alberta is once again a stable place to invest. We want to send a strong signal to investors that the uncertainty created by open-ended, wholesale reviews of our royalty structure is not going to happen again. By enshrining stability into law, it becomes crystal clear. Investors would no longer need to worry that the rules in Alberta could change halfway through the game.

Through Bill 12 we're recommending an approach that would guarantee no major changes to the oil and gas royalty structure for at least 10 years. We'll also guarantee that once a well starts producing, it will be under the same royalty system for that length of time. This time frame is intended to provide a reasonable time to recover most of the producible oil and gas from new and existing

wells. This guarantee would apply to current oil, oil sands, and natural gas royalty frameworks, including crude oil, pentanes, methane, ethane, propane, and butane.

Through this legislation the basic royalty structures will remain in place, including the ability for regular required adjustments such as setting monthly par prices. The existing structure, rules, and processes will continue to enable industry and government to address significant market and technology changes. It will also allow us to reduce red tape and to simplify processes and provide much-needed clarity to industry. This legislation also confirms that the transition to the modernized royalty framework for wells drilled on or before December 31, 2016, would occur as planned in 2026.

To implement this guarantee, we can do this through amending the Mines and Minerals Act. This would allow government to use existing regulatory powers in an existing piece of legislation, eliminating the need for new legislation and avoiding new red tape.

Madam Chair, the guarantee this bill provides means that stability isn't just something we talk about in Alberta. It's the law. This legislation will help get Alberta back on track and help to restore our competitive advantage and investor confidence.

**The Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

8:00

## Bill 8

### Education Amendment Act, 2019

**The Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am pleased to rise today in Committee of the Whole to discuss Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. First, let me thank all the members who offered their support for this legislation. Of course, a few members of this Assembly have expressed some concerns and questions, and I appreciate having this opportunity to provide some clarification and further details. I will make a few general comments before diving into some of the points raised during second reading.

With the Education Amendment Act I am proud to say that we are building on our province's foundation of excellence, a foundation established by the talented teachers, principals, schools, support staff, and trustees who work day in and day out to support our students. The Education Amendment Act will help them deliver a modern education system so all Alberta children can reach their full potential.

The original Education Act was passed by the Legislature in 2012. It is an act built on years of consultation with Albertans and the education system itself. It has broad support from school boards, teachers, parents, and everyday Albertans. It went through further revision in past amendments in 2015 and was further consulted on for regulations. The Education Act strengthens local decision-making and puts school boards in the best position to determine the needs of their students. The bottom line is that we will have an education system that is more collaborative, more flexible, and more focused on student success. Our proposed amendments will maintain some aspects of the current legislation, and by maintaining the current rules in some areas, we are providing certainty and consistency for the upcoming school year.

As the world continues to change, our school system needs to change with it. I am proud to say that through the Education Amendment Act we are building the framework that puts the student first and is accountable at a local level, and we'll make sure that our students receive the excellent education that all Albertans expect and deserve.

As we all know, the most prevalent comments we heard on this bill had to do with protections for students who participate in GSAs and other inclusion groups. I feel that it's important to clarify a few important misconceptions about student protections for LGBTQ2S+ students under the Education Act. To be absolutely clear, our government opposes mandatory parental notification of student involvement in inclusion groups. Alberta will have among the most comprehensive statutory protections for gay-straight alliances in Canada. Once requested by students, creating a GSA is not optional. In Alberta, like Manitoba and Ontario, the Education Act specifically guarantees in legislation that students are entitled to create inclusion groups, including GSAs and QSAs. Compared to legislation in Ontario and Manitoba, the Education Act provides greater direction regarding the appointment of a staff liaison for the student organization.

Consultation with the principal is not required when selecting a name for the student organization in Ontario and Manitoba. This may be interpreted as slightly stronger protection than in the Education Act. However, despite what some people have suggested, the Education Act specifically states that students may select gay-straight alliance or queer-straight alliance as the group name.

With amendments introduced through Bill 8, we are also clarifying that board obligations regarding welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments, policies, and publicly available student codes of conduct apply to all publicly funded schools, including accredited private schools.

Reference has also been made to Nova Scotia and British Columbia, which have no overarching provincial statutes protecting GSAs. Unlike the Education Act, British Columbia's ministry directive and Nova Scotia's provincial policy are not enshrined in provincial legislation.

In Alberta the privacy of students is also protected under strict privacy laws. As many of you know, the Privacy Commissioner recently brought independent, additional clarity to this point as well, for which I am grateful. Students cannot disclose a student's membership in any inclusion group as there are student privacy considerations that trump all other legislation, including the Education Act and the previous government's Bill 24. All school authorities are required to follow privacy legislation. Public schools must follow the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and private schools must adhere to the Personal Information Protection Act. School authorities may only disclose personal information if authorized under these laws. This government also recognizes that every child is unique and every circumstance is different. Legislation needs to balance protecting children and their privacy with the rights of parents so children are getting the supports that they need. This approach provides a clear balance between student privacy and parental rights, a balance and a clarity that was not found in Bill 24.

I know that timelines have been mentioned several times when it comes to creating a GSA. Let me be clear. School authorities are expected to follow the law. This means that when the Education Act comes into force, school authorities will be responsible for ensuring that schools adhere to the policies and practices under the act. If the student, parent, or guardian feels that the teachers or the principal in a school are not meeting their obligations, they can elevate their concern to the superintendent, their school board, and, if necessary,



the minister, as is proper procedure. Despite what some suggest, our government believes that the safety of all students in schools is paramount.

I look forward to engaging students, parents, teachers, and administrators as we work together to build a modern education system which supports all students.

Another frequent topic raised during the debate had to do with trustees. Some of the members opposite seem to think that when the Education Act is in force, a group of trustees can gang up on another trustee at any time for any reason and fire them. That is ludicrous. Under the Education Act, boards are required to develop and implement a code of conduct for trustees, which includes definitions of breaches and sanctions up to and including disqualification of a trustee from the board. This is about professional conduct and clarity of expectations for trustees. Each board will develop a code of conduct that defines what type of trustee behaviour or breach would result in such a disqualification. Each trustee would then be expected to follow that code and could face sanctions, including disqualification, if they do not do so. This will create clarity for trustees on what exactly is a breach and what the sanctions would be for that breach. Elected or not, Albertans expect school trustees to work hard for their students in a professional manner. As a former trustee myself I think this expectation is both fair and reasonable. More than that, it is just common sense.

During the second reading debate we also heard a few comments on school charters. There seems to be an underlying fear that by supporting charter schools, we will negatively affect the public school system. This couldn't be further from the truth. Alberta has a long and successful tradition of supporting school choice, and our government is committed to ensuring parents have options that best meet the educational needs of their children. Charter schools play an important role in Alberta's education system by offering more choice for students and their parents. Charter schools are public schools that operate under a term-specific agreement with the Minister of Education. Charter schools follow provincial curriculum while also providing unique programs or learning approaches designed to improve student learning. Charter schools cannot be faith based.

Anyone wanting to start a charter school must first approach a local school board to see if the board can accommodate the alternative program. This was the case under the School Act, and it will continue under the Education Act. Charter schools are also expected to share their innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community so that all students may benefit.

One of the members opposite suggested that under the Education Act the, quote, duty to report, unquote, will not apply to charters. This is simply not true. The same member also suggested that the act removed protections for charter students to being exposed to hateful or discriminatory views. This, too, is not true as the welcoming, safe, and caring section of the act applies to charter schools.

Choice is one of the reasons Alberta has one of the best education systems in the world, and we intend to keep it that way. Choice of schools, including charters, is about meeting the needs and interests of our kids so that they can reach their full potential. Let me be as clear as possible: we believe in charter schools, and charter schools are here to stay.

**8:10**

The members opposite also touched upon several other points during the debate, so I'd like to take some time to clarify a few things. One of the members pointed out that the word "specialized"

was removed from the bill. This is true. The term was removed in some places in an effort to recognize that supports and services need to be provided to all students, not just to students in need of special education. On the surface, this is a small administrative change, but it is a positive one. We are making this change to be more inclusive.

During the debate the topic of inclusion policies was raised. With our amendments we are clarifying that board obligations regarding welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments, policies, and student codes of conduct apply to all publicly funded schools, including accredited private schools.

We are also ensuring that a certain class of schools will continue to be exempt. For example, heritage language schools, which offer authorized language and cultural courses outside of regular school hours, usually on Saturdays, could be exempt. I would just like to clarify that these are the only class of schools that would be exempt.

Now, "director" versus "child intervention worker": one of the members highlighted that the word "director" is being taken out for "child intervention worker." Children's Services made this change some time ago. Because they made that change, we are aligning language in the Education Act with the language used by Children's Services.

Finally, the same member also raised concerns that government is talking about not having boards for private schools. This is just not the case. In the Education Act the terminology we are using is changing from "operator of a private school" to "a person responsible for the operation of a private school." However, this is just a terminology change, but it still means the same thing. The definition of "person" can refer to one person or persons or a corporation like a society. Under the Education Act, where a person or society is operating a private school and they don't have elected trustees but they have a governing board of the society, many of the rules in the Education Act still apply.

I was proud to take part in the conversation and collaboration over the many years that we'd been working on and awaiting the Education Act coming into force. It's been gratifying over the last number of weeks, on an almost daily basis, to hear from trustees, boards, administrators, parents, and, yes, even students that are pleased that Bill 8 has been introduced. Hopefully, the Education Act will finally come into force.

In conclusion, I would like to once again thank all the members who have shared their thoughts and supports for Bill 8. The original Education Act, together with the proposed amendments, will deliver a provincial framework focused on educational excellence in Alberta, one that Albertans expect and deserve and one that I am proud to be the minister of.

Thank you.

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

**The Chair:** Would you like to adjourn debate and rise and report progress on Bill 8?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I move to adjourn debate on Bill 8, and I would like to go to Bill 11.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

## **Bill 11 Fair Registration Practices Act**

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

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 11. I'm sorry I didn't have a chance to

speak at second reading because, of course, second reading is the time when we get an opportunity to speak to the intent of the bill. I would have liked to have taken the time to express my support to the government for bringing forward a bill doing this kind of work and, you know, talk a little bit about the importance of the work that we are all doing to try to create a much more inclusive society and to make sure that people, no matter where you come from and what your background is, have a chance to participate in the great opportunities that the province of Alberta offers to everyone.

I can tell you that just in my personal experience – and I'll speak about some of my work experience – as an MLA in my community, every Friday I set some time aside to meet with people who require some documents that are done for purposes of submitting their credentials such as when they need a notary public or a Commissioner for Oaths. I really like doing that. It's one of the pleasant times in my day. You know, we deal with many challenging issues as MLAs, and sometimes you do feel very sad that you can't always address the issues that people bring to you because they're very complex. But in this case, when someone comes in for simple documents, it allows you to do the work quickly. It doesn't take longer than usually about five or 10 minutes. But it also, then, allows you an opportunity to speak with people a little bit about where they're coming from and what it is that brought them in to have the documents signed.

The vast majority of people that do come in are people who are immigrants to Canada and who are working very hard to create a space for themselves and their families in this country. I think that, you know, it's a real pleasure to hear from people who have worked very hard in their country of origin, where they were born, and then have made a very, I think, courageous decision to move from whatever country that is to come here. I haven't had to leave my country – opportunities have always been very positive for me here – so I have a deep respect for people who have uprooted themselves and come here. I know, as a descendant of Irish immigrants to Canada a little over 160 years ago, that my family must have gone through some very difficult times that led to them wanting to come to Canada and participate.

I think it's incredibly important that we're doing this piece of work. I would like to support the intent of the government in terms of doing this piece of work, but as we're in Committee of the Whole, I need to take some time to speak to some of the concerns I have about this bill. While I do intend to support it, my overall concern with this bill essentially is that it is just simply too weak. It has taken what I think is a very significant issue, one that we should be tackling and probably could tackle from both sides of the floor in a nonpartisan way. I haven't heard anybody fundamentally disagree with the notion that if you've been trained as a doctor or an engineer or a teacher in another land, we should be seriously looking at the credentials that you have and welcoming you into this country to help add to the good things that we have here in the province of Alberta.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

What, unfortunately, has happened here, though, is that the government has just decided to take a quick win rather than actually deal with the problem. They said: how can we get something that looks good and where we can go out and we can tout to all of the members of our community who are part of immigrant communities and are looking for their credentials to be recognized and say to them, "Look, we've done something for you"?

8:20

My underlying issue here is that this bill has no depth, and I'm concerned. A number of the bills that have come forward to us here

in this House reflect the same underlying problem, that while they may have a positive intention, may be going in the right direction, the government simply hasn't done the work to sit down and look at: how can we actually tackle the problem at hand? Not: how do we create a press conference? Not: how do we create a meme or some social media post so that we can look like we're doing things? But, rather: how do we actually solve a problem that's in existence?

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

I want to speak a little bit about some work that I was involved in quite a few years ago now. I'm one of the older people in this House, so my dates sometimes sound a little askew to some of the other members. But back in 1999 I was working for the Edmonton Social Planning Council. We took the time to work very closely with a group of immigrant women from across the province of Alberta and speak to them about this exact problem. I wanted to point out the date of it because I wanted to point out that it was 20 years ago that this work was completed. We put together, I thought, a fairly reasonable report on the very slim amount of money that was available to us at the Edmonton Social Planning Council – I will table it at the appropriate time tomorrow – and that report was called *Over-qualified, Underemployed: Accessibility Barriers to Accreditation for Immigrant Women with Foreign Qualifications*.

I want to point out this piece of work. Partly, you know, I'm proud of the work that I did. In fact, I was trying to address this issue that you're trying to address today 20 years ago. Thanks for catching up. I would like to talk a little bit about some of the things that could have been in this bill if the government had decided to actually take the time and consult with people in the community about what it is that they need, because that's the problem with this bill, not what your intention was. I'm a hundred per cent in favour of it. I'd work with you on it.

I often offer to, you know, provide a little bit of information to the government side. So far they haven't taken me up on it, but in this case I can just offer you a report that's publicly available and has been publicly available for 20 years. I'd suggest to you that had you gone to a group like the Edmonton Social Planning Council or many of the other ones that work in this area, these incredibly great organizations that we have in Alberta – the Mennonite centre, for example, which works with people from all around; Catholic Social Services, which is probably the longest standing immigrant social agency in the city of Edmonton, well, perhaps in the province of Alberta; and also, for example, Assist Community Services Centre, which has an office in my constituency, the incredible constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford; and, of course, there are many others – if you had taken the time to actually take this bill out and speak to those people, you could have made it so much more comprehensive. You could have added to it some really important things that would only have taken a short period of time to determine.

I want to just briefly look at some of the recommendations that came out on this topic 20 years ago in a report that was freely available to this government by simply typing "immigrant women's qualifications" into a Google search. Even us old guys know about Google, you know. I think that it would have been really nice had you actually gone for a win on this one that was comprehensive and actually met the needs of the community. I know I'm sounding negative right now, but I'm going to vote for this bill because I really want people to have their qualifications properly assessed. But I've got to tell you that I would have loved to have seen more work being put into this so that I'd be happy to vote for it rather than saying: "Well, I guess that's all I'm going to get. I'll take what I can get, and then hopefully we can help push the government to do a little bit more real work as time goes on."

I noticed that under these recommendations – and there are just eight of them, so it's not that complicated. It's a fairly short report, about 40 pages. We were only given about \$10,000 to do this study and to provide the report. There are a number of recommendations that I think are really important. The first one is that they recommend that we develop here in the province of Alberta

a consistent accreditation policy, so the University Co-ordinating Council, IQAS ...

which, of course, is the international qualifications assessment service,

... and the professional associations agree on what is required.

Now, that one, I think, is what this bill is about, that we're actually trying to make sure that we understand what needs to happen. I congratulate you on getting one of the eight. I think it's a positive win.

But let's move on, just for a second, to the second recommendation that's here, and that is what is referred to in the report. When you go to read it – I'm sure many of you will be looking for it, certainly, after – the biggest barrier is the cost barrier for immigrant women. I assume it's also immigrant men, but we were only able, in our particular study, to speak with immigrant women. The second recommendation is to

remove the cost barrier that prevents women from having their education assessed and their professional credentials accredited.

I think it would have been great in this bill if we could have put a section in that actually spoke to the costs and provided some kind of granting system or some kind of support for immigrant people to come into the province and have their foreign credentials recognized.

For many of you, I'm sure you've had a chance to speak with people in the community – or perhaps some of you even had the opportunity to go through this process; I don't know – and I'm sure you know that, in fact, in some cases it can be literally thousands of dollars to have this kind of a process completed, from beginning to end, as you apply for membership in organizations, as you apply for the opportunity to have your credentials analyzed. Of course, you have to obtain your credentials from a foreign country, and then frequently you have to have those credentials converted in terms of language, interpreted, and then, of course, you have to go to a Commissioner for Oaths or a notary public to get them approved, all stamped, and sent off. Thank goodness, MLAs can do that for you for free, but not everybody is aware of that, and that's one of the issues, I think, that's come up and that I think is addressed a little bit more going on here.

I would have really liked to have seen this government actually take a real good dig on this and find out: what are the barriers? Now, this is an old report. I recognize that maybe things have changed quite a bit, but in speaking to the people who come to my door, they're telling me that costs are still a problem. I would have really enjoyed it if there had been some kind of a mechanism addressed to reduce this or at least limit the amount of cost, suggesting to organizations that they can only charge a certain amount before someone is accredited. That would have been an addition to the bill that I would have deeply welcomed.

The third recommendation here in this report is to develop an IQAS ...

That is the international qualifications assessment service.

... marketing plan so employers and immigrants become aware of the service and its significance.

Now, it's been a while since the report was written, but I do know, from my conversations with people who come into my office, that they often do not know about everything that is available. I mean, I know that because very often they tell me how surprised they are that they can come to get the documents signed by myself as a

notary public or a Commissioner for Oaths. And they only know about it because one of their friends happened to tell them about it or because I work very hard to work with the members of my own community and attend churches and synagogues and mosques and, you know, other community groups. Assist, as I mentioned, is in my community, and I try to drop by there three or four times a year and go out to their fundraising events. I am very much aware that there needs to be greater clarity on the process and some kind of a plan to make sure that people are aware of the services that are available.

This bill, again, could have spoken to that, some kind of action to actually help them. When you come into this country, there is so much that you have to contend with. Just moving into a new country is, by itself, a very significant issue, and it would be very nice if somehow the road was at least paved a little bit better, made a little bit smoother so that you could be more successful. I mean, we know from research that when immigrants come to this country, in the first couple of years that they are here, they often depend on a variety of social and public services, and I think that's great. Let me assure you that the left has worked very hard to create those services over the years in this country.

**8:30**

But we also know that they're absolutely worth the investment, that if you do create these kinds of services and you do smooth the road for them as they enter into the country, it does not take very long before they are absolute net contributors to the economy and they are running businesses and they're working for our institutions, whether they are private or public. They really are major contributors to why Canada is so successful, so why don't we pave the road for them a bit? Why don't we make sure that this all works very well?

Another one of the recommendations – in fact, two of the recommendations are very much the same, very close together – is that we review exams for foreign professionals to ensure that they test professional skills rather than English language skills and also review exams for foreign professionals to ensure that they test professional skills rather than English language skills with regard to each individual's profession examinations. One of the things that happens a lot, I know, when people come into my office to see me and ask for my help in terms of moving ahead on that immigrant experience is the fact that very often the barrier that stops people from moving forward is their English language skill, not their knowledge of medicine, not their knowledge of engineering, those kinds of things. What happens sometimes is that the testing does not show their knowledge of medicine or engineering because the language barriers are in the way.

To ask various organizations to make sure that they have clarity – which I think this bill does; therefore, I'm welcoming the bill. In terms of the process it would also be very important that you ask the organizations to ensure that their information is accessible to immigrants as they come into the country, and that means that things are written in plain language, that different terms or uses of knowledge that are quite appropriate to the profession involved are recognized even though they may not be the primary term that's used here in Canada. It may be a different approach in terms of how it's used in other places.

One of the other recommendations here is to allow foreign workers to work toward certification before they immigrate to Canada. Again, this bill: it would have been very nice if we could have created with these organizations an opportunity for people to begin the process long before they even come to Canada so that they aren't arriving at step zero and then moving forward but, rather, arriving much closer to the date of actually being accepted into the

profession. Once they're here, they have so many other things they have to cope with. You have to put a roof over your head and food on the table. You have to get a job as a waiter or a cab driver or some other kind of activity because, obviously, the immediate needs need to be fulfilled. If you could have had most of your credentialing done when you were still back at your country of origin and you didn't have to worry in the same way about all those things because you had much greater family support and perhaps already owned a home and so on there, then you'd be much farther ahead.

The sixth recommendation here is that we need to do more to recognize foreign work experiences, and that means we need to actually ask institutions like medical associations and engineering associations to begin to work with us on – and I think the government has a very important role in all of this – how do we recognize the work that has been done somewhere else? What often people tell me is that when they arrive here, they're being told that they're starting at the very beginning all over again. They've suddenly gone from having been a doctor... [Mr. Feehan's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there any others? The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

**Mr. Copping:** Great. Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to rise and speak to Bill 11 and provide some commentary concerning the comments provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. First of all, I'd like to thank you for your support of the intent of the bill. That is greatly appreciated. It is fantastic that we work together, you know, on certain items that are of benefit to all Albertans and particularly to the immigrant community. That's greatly appreciated.

I wanted to comment on a couple of your comments that you made, concerns that Bill 11 is too weak or has no depth and just provide some opportunity for the background on this. I guess the first comment that I would make is that Bill 11 is the first step in our fairness for newcomers action plan. It's simply the first step. It is, you know, by its nature, not prescriptive legislation. It's overarching legislation, and it's very comprehensive in the number of trades and regulatory bodies that we deal with. If you refer to schedule 1, there are 64 bodies that we're dealing with. They all have different requirements and different approaches. By its very nature, because it's overarching and it's a governance document, it needs to be very general, but the intent behind it is to ensure – and we borrowed from the best of legislation in other jurisdictions, so Ontario, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia. The best elements we put here are so that we can work with the regulatory bodies to ensure that credentials can be recognized in a manner that's fair, that's transparent, efficient, and fast.

I understand your concern, actually, your first look at it, saying that it's not very prescriptive. That is by design because everyone is going to be different. But it does do some things I think that are really important. First, a six-month maximum for an interim decision. One of the things that we've heard and I'm sure you have heard from some of your constituents visiting you is that they've applied for their credentials, they get a response back, and the path forward is not clear, right? Or they get their response back, and it takes months and months and months for their response to get back, and some have even given up. This actually will impose a requirement that within six months of application, maximum, they must have a response and a clear path forward, so at least they know how they continue.

The second thing that it does is that it establishes an office, and the office will help these organizations put in a code. This code we actually pulled from the other legislations, and the code is really that you must have mechanisms that are fair and transparent, appeal mechanisms. On purpose we didn't set up this office to be the appeal mechanism because when you're talking about 64 different bodies, for us to become the arbitrator of all of these different bodies and different criteria would be incredibly difficult, and the potential to get it wrong is very high. We still believe that these regulatory bodies have the role, and this is the statutory role that we gave them to protect the interests of the public. What this does is say: you must do it in a fair way. We gave this bill teeth. This is a paramountcy clause in this, so it applies to all these regulatory bodies but also to government departments and the regulations and the legislation that applies to them. I would submit to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that we are deadly serious about this and getting it right and making it happen.

Then, as well, I would like to just point out some of the enforcement mechanisms, ability to do audits, and then our intent to work with the regulatory bodies. If we can't work with them, then the minister has the authority to issue compliance orders, fines, and then we go from there because at the end of the day, as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford rightly points out, they are creatures of the state, and we need to control them.

I want to thank you for pulling out the report that you did in terms of other recommendations. As I indicated in my earlier remarks, the fairness for newcomers action plan: this is simply the first step. I would like to point you to our fairness for newcomers plan, which is in our platform. I'll mention a couple of things. As you were speaking in terms of recommendations, saying: where is the depth on these other issues? We actually have them in our plan. We just haven't gotten to them yet. For example:

Create an Alberta Government Mentorship for Newcomers Program to match immigrant professionals with mentors in the public service who can help to guide them through the process of credential recognition and finding employment at their skill level.

You mentioned IQAS, the international qualifications assessment service. We have a point in there to support and expand their work that assesses foreign degrees against the Canadian postsecondary standard. You mentioned concerns about – and we've recognized this – when newcomers come to Canada and their credentials aren't recognized, so they're having difficulty to pay for the exam. One point we have in here is to work with nonprofit groups like Windmill Microlending, which do this, to expand access to low-interest loans for immigrant professionals so they can actually write this exam. That was another point that you mentioned. Additionally, "support the work of immigrant settlement agencies to offer skills upgrading," so when they actually need to do some upgrading in terms of the courses that aren't recognized.

8:40

Then, lastly, one point you also made is: work with the federal government to offer prearrival orientation so they can start the credential process before they even get here. At the end of the day, what this is about is about bringing skilled workers into Canada to meet a skills shortage we have here. If we can't meet that skills shortage, our economy doesn't grow, and that's to the detriment not only of the new immigrants, but it's to the detriment of the Alberta economy as a whole.

One other thing I'd just like to point out in terms of our Alberta advantage immigration strategy is that we also made a commitment that we will do consultation on this. So recognizing that it's 20 years

old, we need to update that to see what else is there – right? – and then move forward.

I would like to thank you for your support for the bill and concept, but hopefully with the bill in its context, you can be supportive of how it's written and the rest of our plan. Thank you for your comments.

**The Chair:** Any other comments, questions, or amendments with respect to Bill 11?

**Some Hon. Members:** Question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

**The Chair:** Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 11 and progress on 12 and 8.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Mr. Milliken:** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 11. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 12, Bill 8.

**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.

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move for a unanimous consent motion to waive Standing Order 77(1) and to move forward with third reading on Bill 11, which is the Fair Registration Practices Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

## Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

### Bill 11 Fair Registration Practices Act

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise for the third reading of Bill 11, the Fair Registration Practices Act.

This act builds on the good work that this government is already doing to grow Alberta's economy, get Albertans back to work, reduce red tape, and let the world know that Alberta is open for business. Once passed, Bill 11 will remove unfair barriers to professional licensure while maintaining Alberta's high professional standards.

Last week I had the opportunity to sit down and talk to a group of newcomers who experienced issues having their skills and

experience recognized in Alberta. Along with the Premier, Minister Nicolaides, Parliamentary Secretary Yaseen, and representatives of professional regulatory organizations and agencies that provide assistance for new immigrants, I got to hear their stories.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. minister, I'll just caution you on the use of names in this Assembly.

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you very much. My apologies.

We talked about the regulatory roadblocks that prevent skilled immigrants from achieving their full potential in their chosen professions. Mohamed Alkadi told us how Canadian institutions won't recognize his education unless he provides them with original credentials from the university he attended, but that university is back home in Syria, and Mohamed can't return to his war-ravaged country without risking being conscripted into the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's army or worse.

We also heard from Jacqueline and Felix Sennyah, both natives of Malaysia, who recently became Canadian citizens. Jacqueline has a medical degree from a college in India and Felix has a law degree from the University of London. Neither is working in the professions they trained for because the accreditation process here is costly, lengthy, and uncertain. Instead, they had to take training and work in other jobs to provide income security for their young family.

We heard from Mervin Cereno, a graduate from the Philippines with over 20 years of professional experience. Mervin immigrated to Canada in 2016 as a federal skilled worker. He has been working hard ever since to get accredited in his field in Alberta, but he is still awaiting final approval.

Stories like these of frustrated dreams, wasted talent, and missed opportunities are far too common in our province. For too long too many highly trained and experienced immigrants with skills our province needs have been forced into jobs that they are overqualified for. It's one thing to take the best job available when work in your chosen field dries up; it's something else entirely when you can't get a job because of a flawed or unfair accreditation process.

In Canada it can take many months or sometimes even years for business and professional licensing bodies to recognize the credentials that newcomers earned elsewhere. In the meantime engineers are driving cabs on roads they should be designing, and doctors are cleaning floors in hospitals, where they should be saving lives. This is a tragic waste of human potential and a loss for all of us.

According to the Conference Board of Canada there are over half a million new Canadians working in low-paying jobs that they are overqualified for. The board estimates that they would earn as much as \$12 billion more if their credentials were fully recognized, and they could be making a much larger contribution to our economy, including paying more taxes.

We want to work collaboratively with professional regulatory organizations to speed up the process where possible and increase fairness and transparency. Since introducing this legislation, we have heard positive feedback from many of these professional regulatory bodies, and we are confident that we can work together to reach our goals.

Turning to Bill 11, the primary emphasis for establishing regulatory requirements for a profession is public protection. However, regulatory professions must also serve the public interest by not placing unnecessary barriers for entry to a professional regulatory organization. The proposed legislation will ensure fairness and access to regulated professions for internationally trained individuals. It will achieve a balance between the mandate to ensure the safety of the public, the independence of professional regulatory organizations, and the Alberta government's commitment to ensure that registration practices are transparent, objective, impartial, and fair.

Provinces such as Ontario, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia have fairness legislation to ensure that professional regulatory organizations have fair registration practices and ways to administer this legislation.

We need to make this a priority. Work will flow through the fair registration practices office, and this office will reduce the red tape associated with the assessment of foreign credentials and remove barriers to the full economic inclusion of new Albertans. The proposed legislation makes sense for Alberta. International talent will help grow our economy and show the world that Alberta is open for business.

I thank all members of the Legislature for the comments they've made thus far, and I urge everyone in this Chamber to support this legislation. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the government and specifically the Minister of Labour and Immigration for bringing this bill forward because, of course, as has been stated time and time again, it's desperately needed. Speaking as someone from an immigrant community, I can tell you how difficult it was for my parents when they came here to Canada. Their credentials weren't recognized, and it took them a long while to get jobs in their specific field. Not only that, I remember my mother actually having to go back to postsecondary. She did design at NAIT so that she could upgrade and get the things that she needed so that she could then later on work here in the province of Alberta.

8:50

That being said, I can tell you that in the constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie it's widely diverse. You probably have people from all over the world that call Edmonton-Ellerslie home now. It's like having our own little United Nations there. There are many, many newcomers who call Edmonton-Ellerslie home, and I'm very happy to represent them.

I had the opportunity to grow up here. As I mentioned before in the House, there's a big difference between coming here as a refugee and coming as an immigrant. Of course, those who come as refugees are fleeing violence. They basically flee with the clothes that they have on their backs, maybe a few things. They're not prepared to actually leave in any concerted way. Immigrants usually have a lot longer to plan for their trip out of the country and to the new country that they're going to call home. The other big difference is the fact that refugees had to flee or they were exiled, and they're always thinking that they're going to be able to go back sometime because, of course, where they have come from is their home. There's a big difference there.

One of the things that I want to share as well is that not all refugees are able to go back home. This is the experience of the gentleman from Syria that you mentioned. It doesn't look like Syria is going to be changing any time soon, so a lot of the refugees that are coming from Syria, I suspect, are planning on staying here for quite a while and calling this their home forever.

That was the experience of many Chileans, of course. The military dictatorship ended up lasting 17 years. We never thought that it was going to last that long. We thought it was going to be maybe three, four years at the very most and that families would be able to go back. After 17 years there were a number of Chilean families that did end up going back, but there was a big difference. It was a big change. The country was not the same country that they had left, of course, not only politically speaking but economically

speaking and also culturally speaking. There were a number of changes that had occurred.

That being said, the experience of many newcomers, as distinct as they may be – it's really important to consult with them. I'm glad that you had the opportunity to speak to some of them, Minister. I want to say that under the previous government, the Alberta NDP government, as has been shared a number of times, through our antiracism framework and strategy we actually went out and consulted with a number of communities. Within Edmonton-Ellerslie I took the opportunity to meet with a number of different ethnic communities. It was really interesting because all of them identified this as a major issue. All of them. Each and every ethnic community identified this as being a major problem.

I just want to be able to share with the minister a little bit of the feedback that I received while I was doing this consultation program. Now, of course, before I go into that, though, one of the things that the Alberta NDP government did was to work on establishing the mentorship program for accreditation, which seems quite similar to this. Other issues that were brought up by constituents were, specifically, the cost of having to go through the accreditation process.

Now, in the bill there are a number of associations listed, but the majority of the people that I spoke to were specifically nurses, doctors, some engineers, of course. All of them identified the cost of the accreditation process as being astronomical. There was one doctor that told me that through the process of having to go through several steps and then having to take a number of tests and things like that, it was almost \$30,000 for him to get his accreditation and that, even still, he wasn't able to practise here in the province of Alberta. I think that the cost of the accreditation process is something that really desperately needs to be looked at. Perhaps that can be brought into line or made more economical or there are other ways that we can find to help specifically newcomers.

Of course, refugees, newcomers are coming with limited economic resources. For them to invest \$30,000, \$50,000 into an accreditation process is a significant amount of money, something that they could put towards buying a house or buying a car instead, which they also desperately need so that they can continue to function and work within the specific qualifications that they have.

Now, second was the completion of the English language requirement. There were so many of the constituents that I spoke to that highlighted this as being a major problem. It was the IELTS exam specifically that they were speaking about, that they had to reach a level of 8 in every classification. Some would go and take the exam, and they would get an 8 in all of them with the exception of one, where they would get a 7. So they would fail the exam. Then they would study, go back, and pay for the exam again – and I can't remember how much it was, off the top of my head, but it was a significant amount of money – and then they would get a 7 in another classification. What a lot of the constituents were saying to me is that if there was a way that they could perhaps amalgamate all the times that they take the exam – if they got an 8 the first time but the second time they got a 7, why couldn't they take both exams into consideration?

Of course, at the end of the day what we need are people who can speak English well, and the majority of these people can speak English very well. I mean, I would challenge each and every member within this House to go take that IELTS exam and see if they pass. I can tell you that I don't know if I would pass each level, all five of them. That's something that I'd like to share with the minister, of course, that they have to go through the process of taking several exams and it was very difficult.

The other thing that was highlighted by so many of the constituents that I spoke to was that regardless of going through the

accreditation process and paying all that money, when they finally got the accreditation, the answer that they would get when they applied for jobs was: well, you don't have any Canadian work experience. Of course, other members have spoken to this already, that it's not only about foreign qualifications but also about foreign experience and if that could be taken into consideration.

When talking with constituents, we were kind of hashing out ideas, just kind of putting ideas out there. It would be really great if there was some kind of an incentive for Canadian businesses, Canadian institutions, through some kind of a subsidy, perhaps, similar to the summer temporary employment program, where if companies could be encouraged to hire newcomers, they would get the subsidy. That person could then train for six months, 12 months, whatever the case may be, at a subsidized rate and then continue to work within that institution or business, having now been accredited. They get the work experience that they need, and then they can continue either with that business or, now they have six to 12 months of Canadian work experience, they can go and apply for a job somewhere else. That was something that the constituents shared with me, of course.

Now, all this comes down to, of course, the dignity of work. I just really want to share this with all of you because so many times you hear this rhetoric, and I'm not suggesting that it's coming from anybody here in the House. So many times you tend to hear, "Oh, these immigrants are coming to take our jobs," which is something that you hear out in the public sometimes. I think that has got to be taken into consideration. There's that level of racism that exists within Alberta society. Some people have that kind of a viewpoint. Regardless, I mean, it's something that has to be taken a look at.

Then, of course, the other thing that's really important is that all of these people are coming here because they have families. The majority of them have families. Either those families are here, or they have families back home which they are desperately trying to bring here. I just want to give you the case of a Pakistani gentleman who lives in my constituency. He's lived in my constituency for over the past 10 years. His wife and his three children are still back home in Pakistan. He's desperately trying to bring them here. He's also going through this accreditation process of trying to get recognized as a doctor here in Alberta. Of course, he's working as a taxi driver, and I think he has one other job that he does during the day in order to make ends meet. At the same time, he's providing for his family back home, trying to bring them here. Of course, I just say this because newcomers to Canada are really hard-working people.

9:00

There's also the example of a recent Syrian refugee who opened up their own business. I think it was like a Nut Man kind of venue, where he roasts all of his own nuts and then goes to different businesses selling all of that, of course. This is just another example. These individuals that we're trying to help: they deserve their own dignity, and our government should be trying to do their very best to make sure that we're providing opportunities for everybody, where everybody has the opportunity to participate in this economy. We'll find that these newcomers to Canada have so much to contribute, and they're only going to enrich not only our economy but our culture and our political system.

With that, I'll say thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I'll take my seat.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is there anybody else wishing to speak to Bill 11? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me so I can just quickly stand in support of Bill 11. I

know a lot of my colleagues here have spoken very, very well about this. Of course, Edmonton-Decore being as diverse as it is, this is some welcome legislation that I think builds very, very well on some of the work that the Member for Edmonton-North West did, especially around antiracism. This was one of the components that was very clearly identified as being a barrier to success for new Canadians coming to Alberta to work.

Just a couple of, I guess, brief comments that I hope will be taken well here. Going forward, as we know, there will be some regulations that are set up in terms of trying to work with the extensive list of associations and colleges and whatnot. My hope is that as these are established, they won't create a bit of a sense of urgency within government around its red tape mandate, the one in, one out. I don't want to see that rushed because they're trying to keep to a bit of a timetable here. It's, like: "Oh, my gosh. We brought in all these new regulations. We need to quickly bring out some other ones and rush around that."

My other comments, again, are just around all of the different organizations that are going to be working around this. There have been comments, of course, around working in co-operation with them and, you know, potential difficulties that may occur around that. Of course, I'm certainly no expert when it comes to some of these organizations, as maybe some of my other colleagues are with the ones that are self-regulating. Of course, I'm sure the process to get to that stage, to be able to self-regulate, wasn't a swift one, and there was probably a lot of effort that went into that.

You know, with a few of them, with just maybe some of the other legislation that's come through here, hopefully there hasn't been any significant animosity that's been created with these organizations that could create a barrier to this one being able to go through very, very smoothly. Hopefully, that will be taken into consideration as we go forward. Sometimes people can inadvertently think that their toes are being stepped on, and we certainly don't want to see that happen.

Again, you know, I'm very pleased to see this coming forward. I think it's good work that's being moved forward from what has been done previously by the former government. I look forward to hopefully seeing more of this in the future, that will allow my residents of Edmonton-Decore – as they come in with high credentials and whatnot, we can get them using that to the benefit of all Albertans going forward.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, I'll just remind all members to keep your conversations as low as possible. It's getting rather loud on all sides of this House when members are trying to speak.

With that, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there are any comments or questions.

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close debate?

**Mr. Copping:** I move to close debate.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Very simple.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

## Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole (continued)

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

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

**The Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I move pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2), I believe – thanks to Mr. Mason, actually, we don't have to move a motion. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2) to give notice that there will be no morning sitting tomorrow, June 27, 2019. Do I have to do it outside of committee? We can do it after we rise and report later? Okay. That's fine.

**The Chair:** Okay. Are there any speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise today to put forward an amendment to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. I have the requisite copies here to distribute. I'll give it a moment.

**The Chair:** This will be known as amendment A1.  
Hon. member, please proceed.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Would you like me to read the entire amendment?

**The Chair:** Pardon me?

**Ms Pancholi:** Would you prefer that I read the entire amendment?

**The Chair:** Yes, please.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment that we're putting forward today is an amendment to section 33 of the Education Act, 2012. It amends section 33(1)(c) by striking out "specialized," which is currently, actually, proposed in Bill 8, and by also adding the following after subsection (2) of section 33 of the Education Act.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The amended provision is subsection (2.1), and it states:

A policy established under subsection (2) must contain a distinct portion that addresses the board's responsibilities under section 35.1, and the distinct portion of the policy

- (a) must provide that a principal is responsible for ensuring that notification, if any, respecting a voluntary student organization or an activity referred to in section 35.1(1)
  - (i) is limited to the fact of the establishment of the organization or the holding of the activity, and
  - (ii) is otherwise consistent with the usual practices relating to notifications of other student organizations and activities,

and

- (b) must provide that a principal is required to
  - (i) immediately grant permission to establish a voluntary student organization or hold an activity at the school under section 35.1(1)(a), and
  - (ii) designate a staff member to serve as a staff liaison under section 35.1(1)(b) within a reasonable amount of time after receiving a request to establish a voluntary student organization or to assist in the organizing of an activity subject to section 35.1(4).

To break that down, Mr. Chair, to summarize, essentially what we are proposing here is an amendment that is consistent with what the Minister of Education has stated is her intent, which is to provide fulsome protections to LGBTQ students who are seeking to establish a GSA in their school.

**9:10**

This amendment would require that a principal is required to, first of all, immediately grant permission when a student makes a request for the establishment of a GSA or a QSA in their school and to designate a staff member within a reasonable amount of time after receiving the request to establish said GSA or QSA. It also requires that a principal is limited in their notification regarding the GSA or QSA. They're just simply limited to only notifying the fact of the establishment of the GSA or QSA and to otherwise treat the GSA and QSA as any other school activity or club or organization within the school.

Essentially, what we're doing here is appealing to the common sense of the Minister of Education in this Assembly. They have stated consistently in this House that they are looking to provide full protections to LGBTQ students by ensuring that they can seek the safety and security of a GSA. It is consistent with the spirit although not precisely of what's in the School Act currently, but really what it does is that it requires a principal to immediately establish that GSA and QSA when it is requested. This is really a common-sense amendment that came as a result of what we know to have been the case. I don't think anybody, even on the other side, has disputed that there are situations where we know that there were school administrators and principals which were hesitant, stalling, dragging their feet on establishing a GSA and QSA, putting it off so that the ultimate result was that a QSA or GSA was not established in a school even though a student had requested it.

This amendment would do precisely what the Minister of Education has said that she wants to do, which is to provide full protections to these students by requiring that the principal immediately establish that GSA. There should be really no, I guess, real reason why this would not proceed, because nobody here has said that they want to discourage the establishment of GSAs and QSAs. Simply providing clear direction to school administrators to do so immediately should not be anything that anybody in this House should have any issue with.

The other piece of this amendment is, again, to require that principals limit the notification to that there has been a GSA established or a QSA established in a school and to treat it as they would any other student organization or activity, just as, you know, a school administrator or teacher does not notify a parent or anybody else when their child joins the drama club or joins the chess club – you can tell what I did in high school – or joins, I guess, an athletic activity.

**An Hon. Member:** What?

**Ms Pancholi:** My fellow members are just realizing what I said.

It simply is treating the establishment of these clubs the same way as others and making sure that parents and teachers have clear direction about expectations around privacy.

Again, the Minister of Education has stood up just very recently, when she spoke to this bill on it being introduced in Committee of the Whole, and stated that she does not support the mandatory outing of kids. We're just asking, simply, that clear direction be provided to school administrators, which is exactly what they asked for a couple of years ago, which is saying: we need some assistance in dealing with, potentially, children and students fearing that they're going to be outed for joining a GSA. We know that there



are instances where school administrators did advise students that if they were to join a GSA or to ever request a GSA, they may have to speak to their parents. We know that's the case. That is a factual statement. We have provided information repeatedly in this House in evidence of that. We need to give students assurances that they can seek to establish a GSA or a QSA and not fear that they will be outed.

This is going to also provide clear direction to any school administrator who is questioning the application of the FOIP Act, because the FOIP Act provides a lot of discretion. This amendment will provide direction to school administrators as to how to apply that discretion under the FOIP Act. The FOIP Act currently allows for school administrators to determine whether or not it is unreasonable to disclose membership in a GSA as a breach of privacy, whether that is a breach of privacy. There's incredible discretion allowed in the FOIP Act for them to do that.

This provision in the Education Act will provide clear direction that it is presumed that there will not be a disclosure. That is the kind of direction that members, that teachers, that principals have sought. They've sought; they've looked to it. They spoke to the previous government and said: "We need your help. We need your help to make sure our members know how to protect their students' rights, how to interpret these complicated privacy provisions, how to apply this discretion. Therefore, we need some direction." It provided clarity, which is exactly what teachers needed, and most importantly it's what students needed. These students are the most vulnerable students. We've repeatedly provided significant evidence to talk about how vulnerable they are, how much it takes for them even to come forward in a school setting to request a GSA, and they need additional assurances to know that joining a QSA or requesting the establishment of one is not going to result in the disclosure of very deeply personal, private information about their sexual orientation, which in very real circumstances has led and could lead to safety concerns, could lead to damage to their mental health, could lead to them being shunned by their family or their community. It was very important that everybody be very clear that this is meant to be a private space. This is meant to be a space for security and for safety for students.

We bring forward this amendment because we think it is true to the intentions that the Minister of Education has stated in this House, that she is seeking to protect these vulnerable students. These amendments can be brought forward with the Education Act. As the minister has stated, she would like to modernize the education system. She believes that bringing forward the Education Act and proclaiming it will do that. That may be the case, but she also has stated very repeatedly that she wants to protect these students, so we're asking, we're appealing to this House and this Assembly to please consider making these very common-sense amendments, which can provide clear direction and security to some of the most vulnerable students in our school system. It is what kids are asking for, and it is what school administrators are asking for, and it is what teachers are asking for, and it is what we owe these kids.

I really encourage the members of this House to consider this. This is a common-sense, practical change that responded to a very real need that was brought up previously. We have lots of evidence – and you've heard it in this House – to support it. We're asking, we're appealing to say: please consider these amendments; they are practical, they are reasonable, and they're the right things to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

Going forward, this amendment will be referred to as A1. Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Northwest, indeed. Go northwest, young man. Thank you so much for this opportunity, Chair, to speak to this amendment to Bill 8. I'm really glad to see this come to the Chamber. As I have described a couple of times, the construction of Bill 24 and the changes that I made to reform what was Bill 10, the first stab at building GSA and QSA legislation here in the province of Alberta, were based on real-life experience and practical considerations from the field. I received a lot of complaints about timeliness in regard to putting together or allowing a GSA and getting a teacher sponsor for that GSA.

So I think that this amendment brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud seeks to address that in a very practical, reasonable sort of way. Mr. Chair, what I had described to you before as a scenario by which we can seek some common ground and try to, you know, demonstrate first principles, which are that we are building legislation here with Bill 8, the education act, to ensure the high quality of education and the protection and the safe and caring environment that we want to create for all children in schools so that they can learn: this amendment, I believe, adheres to those principles in all ways.

I think that what all schools are looking for is clarity, and they're looking for an acknowledgement of the work that they've already done in regard to building their own school policies, you know, going through sometimes several years of having GSAs and so forth. They're looking for an affirmation and acknowledgement that that work that they've done will remain secure and that the next generation of kids coming up next fall in school will have the opportunity for a safe and caring environment, which can include a GSA or a QSA if students choose to call it as such.

9:20

Yeah. I mean, I'm going to keep it quite succinct here, Mr. Chair, because I think that the amendment kind of speaks for itself. I think that if the government sort of thinks through it, this one is pretty acceptable.

You know, again, I don't want to be the one giving out free bits of advice, but this whole thing is very volatile. Like I said before, just the notion of opening up how GSAs are run and the whole thing that's happened here in the last few weeks has really compromised a lot of people in terms of feeling safe and secure. And we're talking about kids that are already not feeling particularly secure, right? So by perhaps reaching back and demonstrating collaborative work here in this Chamber, we can help to walk some of that back, because there are the words that are printed on the page, Mr. Chair, around the laws that we pass here, but then there's the tone that we set in general by moving in a certain direction.

I would suggest that this amendment helps to defuse some of those problems that have been created over the last few weeks. In my humble opinion, I think that this would be a reasonable amendment for all members of the House this evening to accept.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you, hon. member.

Do I see any other hon. members? I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has the call.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak on this amendment, that was thoughtfully put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I have to say that it's really a privilege for me as leader of this party to be able to rise to speak to this amendment after, first, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who was a diligent public servant and lawyer who worked within

the public service to do a tremendous amount of the drafting of the Education Act, which Bill 8 is allegedly designed to bring in, notwithstanding that she didn't work on the part with the flawed attempts to protect LGBTQ kids. Nonetheless, she comes to the table with a tremendous amount of expertise on this as well as a dedicated record of public service that is focused on actually getting the job done.

Then, of course, on the second hand, I'm honoured to be able to speak after the Member for Edmonton-North West, who I personally know spent a tremendous amount of time working on constructing Bill 24 in order to fix the plethora of problems that existed in both the School Act and Education Act as a result of the changes that were included in the previous government's Bill 10. Indeed, we spent a lot of time working together because every time we thought we'd fixed something, we would realize there was another problem and then be coming back, and we'd be trying to problem solve it. And we got a number of legal opinions to try and figure out what was the best way to genuinely protect these vulnerable kids in these schools.

You know, we talked yesterday and I talked yesterday about the very long and sordid history of the efforts of the LGBTQ community in Alberta to have rights for these kids in schools protected. We've gone through the many, many elements of what is currently in this bill and the way in which it will very actively serve to leave them unprotected.

But what this amendment does is that in that very limited application, in the public schools that this government has chosen to have covered by this sort of protection, it would apply just to them. This amendment does not extend the right to be free from discrimination to the private schools that nonetheless receive 70 per cent of their funding from the taxpayers. Rather, it would just apply to public schools. In addition, this amendment does not deal with the idea of creating a safe and caring school overall. You know, as we've said before, the current Bill 8 rolls back the provisions that our government had put in place to ensure that schools had safe and caring policies that specifically spoke to the right of LGBTQ kids and teachers to be treated with respect and equality and safety in the school environment.

Now, the members opposite, for some reason, are uncomfortable with having that kind of policy. Nonetheless, they claim that they are still interested in ensuring that kids who request a GSA will get a GSA. Now, to be clear, we have laid out that you're going to get a much lower number of kids requesting a GSA if they go to school within a school where institutionalized discrimination is permitted, as is the case now in many, many schools across this province.

Nonetheless, let us for a moment take the Education minister at her word, where she says that she wants, really, for kids who want a GSA to be able to have a GSA should they request a GSA in that smaller subset of schools where this government thinks that that is appropriate. All we are trying to do is give meaning to the words and the assertions of the Education minister, that in that smaller subset of schools in the province of Alberta that are fully publicly funded where a kid, regardless of whether or not they are operating within a school that has discriminatory practices, has the courage of their convictions and they seek out the opportunity to create their own supports in order to support both themselves and/or others, other kids in that school, to provide them support, and reach out and ask for that GSA to be established, it be established.

We have told Albertans and we have told this government over and over that we weren't just making this up. The reality was that we had a very serious problem that existed in a number of the fully publicly funded schools in this province where, when an LGBTQ child came forward or, quite frankly, a straight kid who wanted to support their friends who were members of the LGBTQ community

came forward and asked to establish a GSA, in effect the administration could subvert that request by delaying it and by dragging their feet and making sure that it never happened. We heard that this happened and that this happened a lot and that sometimes they just dragged their feet and it never actually happened.

Other times they dragged their feet, and they started negotiating with the kids: "Really? You want a GSA? How about you just have an outdoor recreation club and invite those friends to it. Really? You want a GSA? What about a drama club? Really? You want a GSA? How about a social justice club?" These were the kinds of things. And slowly these kids were sort of, you know, broken down by the ongoing, very intentional delay and refusal of senior administrators within the schools to say: "Yes, of course. You have come forward, and you have asked for a GSA, and the Minister of Education has been on the record saying that kids who want a GSA should get a GSA, so of course we shall have a GSA."

All this amendment that we are putting forward today is designed to do is to ensure that where a GSA is requested, it is in fact permitted immediately. It doesn't mean that the principal has to wave a magic wand and set up a GSA that second. That's not it at all. All they have to say is: "Yes. I give permission. There will be a GSA." Then the other work has to happen within a reasonable time, the work of finding an adviser and all that kind of stuff, and reasonableness is read into the amount of time that it takes to actually create that school club.

**9:30**

So this is a very, very, very simple amendment. It is solely designed to ensure that in that subset of Alberta schools that are fully publicly funded, this government has limited itself to paying attention, with respect to the rights of LGBTQ kids, in that in those schools, notwithstanding policies that may well overtly or subtly discriminate against LGBTQ kids, those kids can have a GSA should they push through that subtle or overt discrimination or, should there be no subtle or overt discrimination, they simply articulate their right to have a GSA. This is about making sure that they get to assert that right. This is about addressing the real problems that we know are true, that without this language they will not be able to assert the right if the principal doesn't want them to. That's the bottom line. Without this language, they will never have the right to assert their request to have a GSA. That is the meaning of the language as it exists; the amendment will fix that.

We have heard the House leader, we have heard the Premier, we have heard the Minister of Education, and I believe we might even have heard the Minister of Children's Services say: we have the best statutory protection for GSAs in the country. What we are telling you is that the way this legislation is written right now – well, on the face of it, we already know that it's not the best because we've already tabled, of course, a number of other examples which are much more fulsome. But even here, if what you really mean is that you want to give that subset of kids who attend publicly funded schools in the province of Alberta the right to have a GSA, then you must write the language to give them that right.

That is not what the language says right now. The amendment that was put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would fix that. It's a very, very simple change, and I can't imagine why anyone would vote against this amendment if they truly believed that this was what they were trying to achieve. It really is a litmus test for whether that is what this government is trying to achieve or not. I, like my colleagues, will not take a long time talking about it other than to say that the test is there for you, and now you have to take the test. We urge you to pass the test. We urge you to act in accordance with your stated objectives.

More important than whether or not you act in accordance with your stated objectives, we also urge you to make these amendments that are necessary to protect these vulnerable kids in our schools. Over and over and over again we have outlined what you must know is true. LGBTQ kids who are forced to hide who they are, whose families don't support them, who are bullied at school, who are told by their teachers or their coaches that they're not good enough, who are told by other leaders in their communities that they are not good enough: those kids are at greater risk not only of the worst outcome, you know, hurting themselves, suicide, but also they are at greater risk of anxiety, of depression, of ill health, of homelessness, of general family disorder, and ultimately unhappiness.

I can't imagine that a person in this House would actually want to allow that to continue, understanding what they do, that this is true, that this is what happens when LGBTQ kids are not allowed access to the kinds of supports they need in order to fully explore who they are in a loving, accepting, supportive environment. That's all these are about. It is really ultimately on their behalf that we are making this request that this government move forward and ensure that this provision is put in place so that in that smaller subset of groups of schools where kids request a GSA, even where they request it in the face of other policies and actions and behaviours that are allowed to prevail within the school, they still can get that safe place in the school for them. They need to have one safe place in that school. We've eliminated the obligation for the school to provide that the whole school is a safe place. That's what we've already done through Bill 8.

What we are asking is that you give meaning to the request that they have one safe place and that that be the GSA. That is what this amendment will do. We urge members to vote for that.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to rise in this Assembly and to speak on this amendment here. It's always difficult to rise after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. She speaks so eloquently on why this amendment is so important.

I think it's something that when we actually stop and read the contents of this amendment, when we actually go through it, we realize that, basically, it only adds one thing, an immediacy requirement – right? – a requirement that principals not drag their feet on allowing a gay-straight alliance or a queer-straight alliance to be established, a GSA or a QSA.

I know that hon. members of the government bench and the government backbench have spoken quite a bit at length about. I know the hon. Minister of Education has stated many times that this government unequivocally supports GSAs. I know the hon. Minister of Justice, in fact, many times during his leadership campaign and then many times thereafter spoke at length about how he supports GSAs and that homophobia should have no place in the Conservative caucus. I believe that many members of the government and the government caucus actually do believe that, Mr. Chair. They do understand how important it is for GSAs to exist and for QSAs to exist and how these actual programs and clubs do save lives. I know the hon. Minister of Finance himself, in fact, just today in question period spoke about how he unequivocally supported GSAs and supported – he referred them to as inclusion groups. I understand that sometimes it's hard to say “gay-straight alliance,” but that's the reality of what we're fighting for here.

If the reality is that these members are telling the truth and that the government bench is telling the truth, Mr. Chair, it should be a small matter to go forward and say that, well, they do believe that

they want the strongest provisions and that they're trying to build the strongest provisions in the entire country around gay-straight alliances. We know it's not quite there yet, but this is a step towards that direction. Immediately granting this permission to students would allow students to then have a discussion around: who is a reasonable staffperson, when will we be able to meet, and when will we have a facility established? Those are the types of questions that are logistical concerns, but we know that we're getting towards the right step. That's something that I think all members of the Assembly can recognize is a good thing for students – right? – to give students the certainty that they will be allowed to establish the clubs they want.

Mr. Chair, I'll admit I'm quite a bit younger than most people in this Assembly, and in fact I remember that in 2014, when the original Bill 10 was being brought through this Assembly, I was a student. I was a student in high school. I recall the arrogant Conservative government, the Progressive Conservative government at the time, actually telling students: well, if your principal doesn't want to give you a GSA and drags their feet, you should take them to court, right? That was the messaging, the arrogance that the Conservatives had at the time, that the Progressive Conservatives had at the time. It was something that I thought was shocking. I mean, students thought it was shocking, and it was something that I know this government doesn't want. This government doesn't want to be wasting school board resources and education resources on fighting frivolous lawsuits around GSAs and QSAs that are legislatively protected, that we know need to be established immediately.

What this amendment does is for greater clarity. It would allow these students to know that they have that right to a GSA, to be in, as the government likes to call them, inclusion groups, to be included in their own schools. It would immediately give them that protection.

If we truly believe, which I know many members do – and I've spoken to many members who have spoken at length about how they believe that – that students deserve this right and that this will help save the lives of those students and improve their mental well-being and the mental health of those students, I think it's important that we stop and say that this isn't a time for partisanship. This isn't a time to reject an amendment because it comes from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. This isn't a time to play games with students' lives. This is a time to realize that if we can pass a good amendment that will help kids, we should.

**9:40**

I really hope that members of the government will get up and speak to this sometime tonight. I mean, I know that a number of opposition members have already spoken to this tonight, spoken to why it is so important. But the stories that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and Leader of the Opposition had spoken to about how principals would say, “Well, would you rather join a drama club?” or “Would you rather join a rugby club?” or “Would you rather do X or Y?”: those were the types of stories that weren't just around as fables or as hypotheticals. Those were the things that were actually happening on the coattails of the arrogance of the Conservatives, and they knew that was going to happen in 2014 there. They knew that was going to happen, and that's why they asked students to go to court.

I don't think anybody in this Assembly believes that high school students should be wasting their time hiring lawyers and going to court. Especially not if they're making \$13 an hour can they afford many lawyers, Mr. Chair. I don't believe that anybody in this Assembly thinks that students should be going to court to fight for their rights and fight for what this legislation ostensibly protects. I

don't think anybody in this Assembly thinks that students should have to file appeals with the Privacy Commissioner after they've already been outed.

I think that we have the opportunity here to close a loophole that perhaps was an oversight by the Minister of Education. Perhaps it was something the government hadn't considered, that this immediacy and the relevance of moving forward with speed for these GSAs was important. I mean, we recognize that, of course, it takes time to establish these clubs, and it takes time to designate a teacher. It takes time to designate a staff liaison. That's why in section 2.1(b)(ii) there is a reasonableness clause – right? – that allows for an amount of time after receiving a request.

But those students, Mr. Chair, in that interim before that club is actually established, deserve the certainty and the peace of mind to know that they are allowed to move forward, to know that they have a government that is looking out for them, to know that they will not be blocked because of politics, to know that they will not be blocked because one teacher or one principal does not agree with their lifestyle, does not agree that they are gay, and does not think that it's something that is wholesome for them. I think that is something that this Assembly can send as a strong message to students, that they will immediately have those protections. I think that's something that is a very reasonable request of this Assembly. It's something that isn't partisan. If what the members of the government have said is true, if they truly do support GSAs, then it's something that I think we should all be able to support.

This actually aligns, I think, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and the Member for Edmonton-North West spoke at length about, to what this government has been saying over and over and over again in this Assembly. It actually agrees with the principle that we should be protecting these students. It actually agrees with the principle that GSAs and QSAs are important to our students, and I think it's something that's very important.

I mean, I hope we're going to hear from one of the ministers here, perhaps, or even a government backbencher on what their caucus may decide tonight about this amendment. This amendment is not just a small change in one word. I mean, legislatively it's not a large document, of course – it's one page – but what it will do is that it will show students that we are putting our actions into play and that it's not just all empty talk, Mr. Chair. That's what we're showing students, that it's not just partisanship, it's not just talk, but we're actually showing them that this legislation will work.

I mean, I can't speculate, Mr. Chair, but I would be concerned about some of the things that perhaps the school that the Minister of Finance is on the board for would do without immediacy, because there are ample opportunities for a school like his, where the Minister of Finance was actually on the board, and in their actual policy book it spoke to how these were demonic practices and how they were sins. I know that many members of this Assembly don't agree with that. I know the Minister of Finance has spoken at length himself, especially in question period, about how he supports GSAs now. I really do want to believe that. I really do want to believe that students that attended that school that the minister was on the board of would have the opportunity to start a GSA if they so requested, would have the opportunity to start a QSA if they so requested. But I will actually assure the Minister of Finance. I will assure him that this amendment actually doesn't affect that because this amendment is only for public schools. It doesn't affect private institutions. It doesn't affect religious institutions like that. But, in fact, it is something that we are only keeping narrowly defined to what is already in the scope of this bill.

So I think it's a very reasonable ask. It doesn't impede the minister's rights and the minister's schools' rights. It doesn't impede his ability to tell students to be gay or not to be gay. But it

does allow us to tell students in public institutions that the bill will be enacted immediately, that the protections they have will be enacted immediately.

It's something that, Mr. Chair, I feel very strongly is important because I saw first-hand, when I was in high school, how important these clubs were, how important GSAs and QSAs were. Again, I've spoken to it in the past, but these weren't anything creative or special. At the GSA at my high school they had a popcorn machine, and we'd go into the film studies room and screen a film – I believe it was every Thursday – and then after everybody would talk. I think they charged 25 cents for a little paper bag of popcorn. That was the entirety of the meetings that we had every week, and it was important because it showed students that it didn't matter whether you were lesbian, whether you were gay, whether you were bisexual, whether you were two-spirited, whether you were queer, whatever you identified as; students were able to come together and watch the latest *Toy Story* movie, because that's all students want to do.

They want to know that as a group they can feel safe and hang out. That's what we want principals in schools to do immediately for students. For our publicly funded and separate schools, we want them to be able to immediately know that they can go have that movie night under the name "GSA" or "QSA." That, I think, is something that students deserve.

I know, Mr. Chair, that students perhaps can't vote. They're not 18 yet in the majority of cases, but even though that's true, I think that they deserve the opportunity to live their lives the way they see fit. We know that in many cases students feel the safest at school because that's where all their friends are, that's where the teachers they trust are, and that's where they spend the vast majority of their formative years.

Because of that, we understand that having the GSA on school grounds is one of the most important things. It provides a venue, and you're not, then, asking students to have to go rent a community hall with funds they won't have. You're not asking students to go and fight in court to get something started with funds and lawyers that they don't have access to. We understand that the relevance of having that quickly implemented is important for these students because students, especially students who are in a vulnerable mental state, Mr. Chair, who may have mental health issues, who may be LGBTQ and have many things going on in their lives – we know that sometimes you just need a little bit of certainty. Sometimes you just need a space that you can go to and where you know your friends are there and you know that the people you trust and care about are going to pat you on the back.

Mr. Chair, I'm sure every single member of this Assembly can relate to that. I'm sure every single member of this Assembly can name a time that maybe they were feeling a little down and needed a friend. That's what GSAs do. We should immediately grant permission for these kids to be able to identify that way and have that space where they can pat each other on the back, where they can go watch a movie, where they can share a soda pop. It's not complicated. It's not something that is special. It's not something that is unusual. What students want to do is be students, be kids, and be allowed to be who they are while they're being kids.

I hope members of the government can understand that. I mean, I know that a lot of them have spoken at length about how they understand that. They have spoken at length about how they unilaterally support, unequivocally support gay-straight alliances, Mr. Chair, and support the formation of gay-straight alliances. If they indeed were telling the truth, if they indeed actually support GSAs, then there is no reason not to tell schools and school administrators that GSAs must immediately be granted permission.

9:50

That's all students are asking for. They're asking for permission to hang out in a space that will be safe for them. They're asking for permission to have a childhood where they feel like they are accepted, where they feel they are loved, and that is something I think every single member of this Assembly, Mr. Chair, should be proud to fight for. We should be proud to be supporting our students to have, as the government likes to call them, inclusion groups. We should be proud to be able to say that those inclusion groups would be formed immediately.

I can't think of a single reason not to accept this amendment, Mr. Chair. I hope that somebody from the government will get up tonight and explain to us what their direction will be on this, whether they support this amendment, whether they think there are flaws with this amendment and would like to amend it again, whether they will be rejecting this amendment.

Mr. Chair, these are the questions that Albertans and students deserve answered, because there are no tricks behind this amendment. There is nothing in this amendment that will attack private or charter schools. There is nothing in this amendment that will infringe on the rights of parents. There is nothing in this amendment that is a blatant partisan attack. All it is is a common-sense updating of language so that students can have timeliness to their requests. I think that's something that most members of this Assembly should understand.

In fact, Mr. Chair, the government speaks at length to how they are conservatives and they strive for efficiency and all of those things, and really all we're asking for is a little bit of efficiency in making sure these GSAs and QSAs get established – right? – making sure that these gay kids and queer kids are able to have that space immediately. I hope members of the government are listening.

I hope members of the government understand the impact this will have, because this was fought already, Mr. Chair. This exact debate happened in this Chamber basically five years ago, in 2014, when Bill 10 was first introduced and with Bill 202 as well under Laurie Blakeman. When this debate happened, Albertans and students made it clear that the right to establish a GSA shouldn't be dictated by how much your school administrator liked you, right?

Mr. Chair, I'm sure many members of this Assembly will have a story about how they got into an argument with a teacher, with a principal, or a vice-principal at some point in their lives. Perhaps they mouthed off at the wrong time. We don't believe here in the opposition that that should be a reason you're not allowed to have a GSA, that that should be a reason that that administrator can then drag their feet. That's something that I feel very strongly about. I feel very strongly that no matter who you are or what you've done, you should be able to have that safe and caring environment provided for you, especially when we are as legislators and as the education system and the Education minister in charge of so many of these students' formative years, so many of these students' lives for so much of their time.

Why would we vote against this? Why would we speak against this? I could not tell you, Mr. Chair. I'm hoping we'll hear from any member of the government on how they feel about this amendment. I hope we'll hear from any member of the government backbench on how they feel about this. Perhaps the Member for Drumheller-Stettler would like to get up and talk about how he supports GSAs and that this would be something that he would support having in one of the schools he taught at. Perhaps the Minister of Finance would like to get up and speak about how he would support a GSA in the school that he was a board member of. I think those are all very important questions.

I think it's very important that we take a good, long look at the amendment and realize that there are no tricks going on. I feel like the government looks at our legislation and amendments and they always think there's going to be a trap door. Well, Mr. Chair, the trap door is only there if you walk into it. Really, the solution is going to be to support this common-sense amendment, allow it to pass, and let students know that they are safe, they are protected, and their government cares for them.

We have the opportunity to do the right thing right here tonight. We have the opportunity to tell every single student in this province that we care about them. So I really urge all members of the government and the opposition here to support this amendment. I hope we will hear from a member from the government, whether it is the Minister of Finance or the Member for Drumheller-Stettler or anybody else, for that matter. But we will see, Mr. Chair, and I think that will be the test, and that will tell us whether they walk into that trap door.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview standing to speak to amendment A1.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and also speak to the amendment from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Of course, as has been described by my colleagues, the slight adjustment to the bill in the form of the amendment is to include that a principal must immediately grant permission to create a GSA and designate a staff liaison so that students may have a GSA in a very timely manner. This, of course, gives a timeline for fulfilling this request, which, sadly, Bill 8 doesn't include at this time. We know that students don't need GSAs in due course; they need them now. This amendment will absolutely ensure that principals do act now. So although it's sort of a small step, it is a significant one.

We know that students who are grappling with their sexuality often feel isolated. They're not accepted, they feel that they don't belong, and indeed they're afraid to actually be open about who they are. It may not be safe for them to reveal their true selves. Of course, part of, you know, being a human being is that we all need to belong. It's just a fundamental aspect of being human. For young people, when they're trying to fit in, the teenage years are – I don't know; for me, for sure, they were horrific. I know that it's a very difficult time, and when you have this added challenge, when you know you're sort of, in quotes, not normal, it can be extremely painful and create a lot of challenges for young people. This fundamental need to belong can be met by the creation of a GSA in a timely manner for students so that they can be with straight, gay, queer, trans, other kids and be accepted in, you know, a safe community.

I spoke previously in the House regarding my middle son. He was bullied quite a bit when he was in sort of later elementary, grades 5 and 6, and he, of course, never ever shared this with me. He blamed himself and just kept it all quiet, to himself, instead of reaching out to his teachers or his dad or to me as his mom. He didn't actually reveal this to me until he was in his junior high years, so maybe it was grade 8 or 9. This made all the difference for him because I was able to accept and love him despite this challenge, because he kind of blamed himself. He thought that he was doing something weird and that that's why kids were giving him a hard time, and he had a lot of shame. I mean, I'm not trying to equate this at all with the things that kids who are struggling with their sexuality go through, but I think that, you know, all of us can understand just how hard it is when you're not belonging and, in fact, you're being ridiculed

because you're different or people are sort of picking on some weakness that's part of you.

I know that for my son it made all the difference for him when he could be accepted and supported. He didn't have a group that would accept him in school so much, but he did find that in his home. Unfortunately, so many children don't have that. They won't be accepted, unfortunately, in their homes, and that is sad. Certainly, I think that the more, perhaps, different you are, the more likely that is.

**10:00**

You know, working as a social worker for the last 30 years, I certainly saw a lot of kids who were not accepted by their parents, and for various reasons a lot of times parents themselves certainly had their own challenges. They had lots of barriers to them being able to be present and supportive of their children. It could be from poverty or their own, you know, significant abuse that they'd experienced as children and that perhaps they were experiencing right now in an unhealthy domestic violence situation. These kinds of things take people out, and they cannot always be there for their kids. So why wouldn't we create a GSA in schools so that kids can have that support in an environment that is available to them already, with a timeline on that so that the principals do not put this off? As the Leader of the Official Opposition spoke about previously, unfortunately some principals had suggested different kinds of groups that might address that issue and weren't really willing to create a GSA in a timely manner.

We all say, of course, that this is what we want, you know, that people will do this or want to support kids. But we do have to have timelines. We do have to make sure that the full intent of supporting kids is implemented. As has been said before, if this sometimes isn't in place, things are not carried through on.

I think this amendment makes eminent sense, and I think that it can very much support children to have a safe place where they may not have that safe place anywhere. As I've said before, we know that having, really, just one relationship where people can reveal who they are and still be accepted for who they are, you know, could make all the difference in someone's life. That can shift their thinking from blaming themselves and getting down on themselves so much to a point where they might start having suicidal ideation. They might start thinking that that's the best way for them to resolve these issues and these challenges that they're experiencing, and then they begin to develop a plan, and they think about: "How am I going to do this? I'm going to go to my parents' cabinet maybe, and I'll get some drugs out of that." There are a million ways that kids can think of to do that. Unfortunately, we know that suicide amongst the LGBTQ community is much higher than for the straight community.

Again, Mr. Chair, it just makes a lot of sense that we would not delay, that we would make sure that principals would act on creating GSAs in a timely manner immediately, and that we would also make sure that there is staff support to help the young people who would be attending this. I did cite previously that we know that not only are LGBTQ kids supported through these gay-straight alliances, but also other kids are. The risk of actual suicide for heterosexual males was cut by 50 per cent. A study in B.C. was done. It just creates a whole inclusive environment in a school, and it, of course, builds momentum over time. If a GSA has been created that first year, maybe people are a little bit hesitant, but as time goes on, that school – it actually impacts how welcoming and supportive they are of difference, and I think that that is something that needs to be responded to. Therefore, the amendment, that says, "Yes, a principal must fulfill this request immediately," is very important.

I've also spoken previously about a younger friend of mine who is, you know, a professional. He has an undergraduate degree. He has many relationships, has been successful in his career, can provide for himself, takes care of himself financially, but he has still, at the age of 26, 27, not told his parents that he's a gay man. He's still afraid to at this age. I just want members to reflect on that, that a man who's had worldly success and achieved some significant goals is still afraid to share with his parents. So how much greater would that fear be for a younger person? I think that when we're making a decision about this, we need to really keep that in mind.

I mean, this amendment certainly ensures that a GSA is established in a timely manner. It's a small but vitally important amendment to Bill 8. I think that it's really so crucial that all members of the House support this amendment so that vulnerable kids can actually have the support of a GSA in their schools, support that they may not have at home. Even if they may have it at home, they may still not be sure about their sexuality, so they're not willing to bring that up themselves.

I mean, you know, my son is a straight male, but at that time he couldn't tell me. Like, he was at his own developmental level. He was just afraid, and he felt like he was to blame or something for that bullying. I think that that is kind of a normal thing for young people, that they often sort of think: "Well, it's my fault. I'm weird. I shouldn't be like this. It's my fault that someone is giving me a hard time." Certainly, we know that that's true oftentimes in relationships where there is abuse and things like that. Oftentimes the victim blames themselves; therefore, they don't seek out help.

Creating these safe havens for these young people in a timely manner with support from staff at the school is crucial, really, to supporting kids to feel like they belong, and then the benefit, as we've talked about previously, has a ripple effect. Not only is that LGBTQ student supported, but so is that heterosexual student, and so is maybe that newcomer to the community or maybe that kid who moved from a little, small town to the city and now are in this place that they don't feel like they belong. You know, we could go into many different constellations of characters to see who could be supported.

I just want to stress, Mr. Chair, that, you know, creating safe spaces for students is key, and it's not something that can be delayed. These students need support. We know of too many – too many – tragic stories where they're not supported, and then there sometimes are very dire consequences before that. So I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in support of this amendment.

**The Deputy Chair:** I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie rising to speak.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Everything okay?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Absolutely. How are you doing?

**Member Loyola:** I'm doing fantastic, sir. I'm doing fantastic.

**The Deputy Chair:** Through the chair is the comment that I would like to make at this point.

**Member Loyola:** Through you, of course, Mr. Chair.

Through you, I stand to support the amendment that has been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, of course, and speak briefly to it. Before actually getting into the specifics of the amendment, I just want to kind of set the stage and frame it because I think it's very important that we all have a

particular understanding. I know that a lot of people have shared their particular perspectives on this issue.

**10:10**

I want to go back to what I talked about yesterday in terms of privilege. Unless you've actually lived the experience of someone who is LGBTQ, you don't really understand the fear, for example, that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was highlighting as she was speaking and talking about the fact that her friend, who is a man, is still not out and finds it very difficult to share his sexual orientation with the rest of the world. The reality of that is because people fear having to lose opportunities because of discrimination. It's very clear that this discrimination against people of a specific sexual orientation continues to exist. Because of this, it's very important that people who have the privilege of not being LGBTQ or not having the experience of living the reality and not knowing what that discrimination looks like are strongly aware that the lack of opportunities exist for people who are LGBTQ because of the discrimination that continues to exist.

Of course, the proper way to address this as a society is by making sure that we establish healthy relationships. We all need to learn how to be more healthy with one another. Before you can do that, you actually need to create a space where you can have dialogue. When I was at the University of Alberta as a staff member, we used to organize both in the fall semester and in the winter semester a week's worth of events called Solidarity Week. During this time it was an opportunity for people from different ethnic backgrounds to come together and actually share their experiences with one another. It was an opportunity to share our history and realize that there are common struggles. Much like between colonizer and colonized, there also exist some correlations between racial discrimination and, of course, discrimination against sexual orientation. Although it is different, there are some correlations there in terms of the outcomes suffered by people who are discriminated against.

Getting back to the point, you need to have a space where people who suffer these indignities as a result of the discrimination can actually voice what their experience is and for those who do not have the experience to actually listen. Those of us who have enough privilege in society that we don't have to face this discrimination can actually listen to someone that is actually living it and going through it. Whether you sympathize or empathize with the person, well, that's up to the individual. You may question whether that discrimination really exists, but of course, at the end of the day, it's an opportunity for you, at the bare minimum, to listen to the experiences that someone who is LGBTQ would have.

Now, underlying the reality of trying to make a change so that we can have a more healthy society is the fact – and I think that everybody in the House knows this. I don't need to specifically focus on this for too long. I think it's important for us to all have a reminder because sometimes you need to hear it from somebody else's lips before you can actually pay some mind to it. Of course, for healthy relationships to exist, there needs to be respect. The reality is that that respect does not exist.

I remember that when I was working on the University of Alberta campus, there were a number of times when there were gay, bisexual, or even trans students who were specifically beaten up on campus. Now, this is happening at a University of Alberta campus. This is where the students are much older. You can only imagine what is happening at other levels of education, be it in elementary school, junior high, or even high school. That same kind of disrespect towards individuals: it's just unfathomable that it would go so far as to go to violence, where someone thinks that the discrimination is so incredible that this individual thinks that it's

okay to use violence against someone who is of a different sexual orientation. Why they would do it, I have no idea. I'm not too sure why. I wasn't brought up to be that way.

The reality is that we have to respect. If you think you can use violence to change people, well, then, we're in a very sad state of affairs if that's what we think. It's very important that we teach children, specifically students in this case, that that's not the way that we need to move forward as a society. As everybody recognizes – I believe the Member for Airdrie-East got up in the House this morning and did a member's statement on domestic violence – violence against people of a specific sexual orientation is not the only problem. This is a crisis that continues to exist in our society. There's even domestic violence. As she pointed out in her member's statement today, it's usually that of a close family member. The tendency is that it usually is a male against a female although not in all cases. But that is the tendency.

We have this overarching problem of people using violence in our society, and of course it's a fact that there is no respect there. There is no respect. For healthy relationships to exist, we also need to make sure that people feel supported. As the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was highlighting as she was sharing with the House, this is something that's really important. When we create these safe spaces as GSAs and QSAs in schools, that's indeed what is happening. It's creating a safe space where people who identify as LGBTQ-two-spirited can also go and feel like they're being supported as they continue to work through their identity and where they won't feel bullied, where they will feel supported and will feel that they have a group of students in their school that will support them and respect them.

Of course, the last part of healthy relationships that I'd like to highlight is the dignity of the human person. The sole fact that we are alive, that we are a human being demands the right that we be treated with dignity. I think that's something that everybody in this House can agree to.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Agreed.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

**Member Loyola:** Thank you, hon. House leader, for agreeing with me.

Dignity of the human person, regardless of how that person identifies in terms of sexual orientation or ethnicity or culture or religion or creed, as highlighted in the international agreement on human rights, will be respected. I think that this is something that we often overlook. You know, there are these great laws that we write. We write these great laws which highlight specifically what our intention is, but often the spirit of the law is not taken into account when it's actually being implemented. This is the reason why I think it's so important that we approve this amendment, and I call on all the members of this House to please give this serious consideration. I know that everybody is kind of wrapped up in their own thing, and people might be a little bit tired tonight, but please – please – read this amendment. Please read it because this will only make the bill that much better.

Of course, this is making sure that the principals in schools are responsible for actually making sure that these safe spaces, where GSAs and QSAs are going to be created and that students can actually go to, are created in a timely manner and that the principals are actually responsible not only for making sure that they go forward but also that they're basically promoted within the school so that all the students know that this is actually an opportunity for them if they want to get involved. Right? It would be promoted just like any other club – any other club – within the school, whether it

be the social justice club or a sports team or whatever the case may be. Notifications would have to be sent out just like for any other activity or group within the school.

10:20

Going back, the reality is that, historically speaking, people who discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation are not going to feel responsible to actually do something about it if it's not actually written into the law no matter what the law states. This is why I'm saying that it doesn't matter what is written, actually, in the bill. If it omits this specific piece, which specifically states that a principal is the individual responsible for making sure that it happens, then nobody is going to take it seriously, and nobody will actually implement it. This is what this amendment is trying to do. It's to actually give the responsibility of making sure that it is implemented within each and every school to the principal of that school, the head administrator, to make sure that they are there not only to make sure that notifications for the GSA and QSA are actually put through as any other activity or group like the social justice group but that they will also make sure to appoint a designated staff member as a staff liaison to make sure that the group has support so that it can continue to go forward.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-South was saying, it can be as simple as students getting together to watch a movie like *Toy Story*, whatever it is that the students want to do, because, I mean, at the end of the day, they will be the ones determining what activities they will do together as a group under the newly formed GSA or QSA. I remind everybody that this is simply a safe space where every student will be treated with respect and will feel supported, because each and every one of them deserves to be treated with dignity. That's why it's so important that somebody actually be responsible for the implementation, and the head administrator must fulfill that role.

That being said, hon. members, I think it's very important. I mean, I would go so far as to say that we have the duty to accommodate in this situation, and I would highly encourage each and every one of you in this House to not only give this serious consideration but to actually vote in favour of this amendment this evening.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

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

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise this evening to speak to the amendment to Bill 8, which very simply goes to the heart of the matter and insists that the implementation of a GSA be permitted immediately upon request from a student and that staff be designated in a timely manner to implement the establishment of the GSA thereafter. Really, what it does is get to the crux of the matter, that being that we wish to ensure that the establishment of a GSA is legitimized in the eyes of those it's supposed to benefit, that being the students who wish a safe place to prepare themselves to come out to family members and friends and to identify themselves as a member of the nonheterosexual community in whatever form that may take for them.

I know that hope was raised in the hearts of many young students who were contemplating and agonizing over how they were going to come out to their family. Hope was raised by the previous government's legislation, and many students – I'm just trying to picture myself, put myself in the minds of students who were perhaps preparing themselves during the tenure of the existing legislation to come out, making use of a GSA, yet had their hopes dashed with the new government's proposals to bring forward Bill

8, which will remove the safe haven in the minds of many who were hoping to perhaps use a GSA to find a way to come out to their parents.

The bottom line, Madam Chair, what our government's motivation was – and, hopefully, it's the same motivation that the current government has in its own legislation with respect to GSAs – was saving lives. Now, that's kind of a homogenized way of saying “preventing death,” but that's really what we're doing. I mean, bottom line, we're talking about death. We're talking about young people dying and not in a pretty way. Like, the death of a young person is never pretty. It's an unnatural thing. What we're talking about is death by suicide, death by some violent means because a young person has found themselves kicked out of their own home and living on the street; death by drug overdose because of a life of addiction that's caused by a young person who is ostracized by their family having no place to go and ending up trying to support themselves with the sale of drugs or ending up prostituting themselves on the streets of Alberta cities.

We're talking about those individuals dying, so when we are here to discuss such a serious matter as young people dying, we're reminded of a government's primary responsibility. Your first priority as a government is the protection of human life, of our citizens. There are many ways to do this with legislation, but here we have at its most fundamental core the government's responsibility to protect the lives of children. We're letting in many cases, I believe, religion get in the way of our thinking on this. It's not a question of what your fundamental core religious beliefs might be. It's a matter of whether or not these children's lives are at risk as a result of the legislation that we're looking at implementing in this province.

I implore members, on all sides of the House, to try tonight, as we talk about the amendment, to reimplement, basically, a major piece of what we had in our legislation – and that is the permission for a GSA to be immediately established, the requirement that it be immediately established upon request and why, indeed, that's so necessary – to be able to place themselves in the mindset, the mind, of a young person, a young boy or a young girl, say, in grade 7 or 8, a student in a junior high school in Alberta, knowing that they've identified themselves as not being heterosexual, knowing that they have a family that is not accepting of them.

I know that there are members, on both sides of the House, who have worked in social work and witnessed these situations and heard stories of that, but we have in some cases heard conflicting thoughts about the benefit of GSAs. I don't know where that comes from, because in the mind of a young person who knows for sure that their family is going to kick them out if they come out to them, who knows that they don't have the tools and they don't know how they're going to tell that story to their parents and their family in a way that's going to save that family unit and allow them to stay in that home – it's got to be a terrible black hole. I mean, to really think that there's no way that they can be who they are within their own family unit: what an absolutely depressing and very dark place to be.

10:30

I can well imagine that there are young people now who thought they were in the planning stages to use a GSA, to find the tools to come out to their family members, and who now have had their hopes dashed. If indeed you can wrap your mind around that situation, as somebody in grade 7 or 8, you know how fragile you were yourself as a grade 7 or 8 student regardless of having the potential challenge to your own thoughts about your own sexuality and then coming to terms with that yourself. And then you know: if I indeed bring forward this challenge that I have within myself to



my family, I'm going to end up kicked out of the family unit. But then you think: well, gee whiz, this GSA is something where I can get some help, a place where I can talk to somebody, and I'm going to go ahead and do that.

You contemplate that for a while, you roll it around in your mind, and you're fearful and you're scared to go ahead and make that choice, and then – bang – the government changed. Guess what? Rules have changed. “You know, I may be able to go ahead and talk to the principal about setting up a GSA, but I'm no longer guaranteed that that request is going to be kept private. I mean, there's a possibility that that person is going to go right away and inform my parents.” Right away the whole legitimacy of that GSA is out the window, and that person is back at square one, back in that dark hole, that place of fear, wondering if indeed they'll ever be able to come out to their family and declare who they are.

Given that lack of opportunity and the safe space to go to, there's a risk that when they go to their family, they will be kicked out. And that happens. That happens in pristine families, religious and nonreligious families. The fact is, though – and it's been noted by members of the government here in their social work in past lives – that, yes, indeed it was a religious philosophy that prevented the family member from accepting their own child as being gay, and the result that we're talking about here, fundamentally, is the death of children.

I fail to understand why the government, in its wisdom, can't see the way a young person is seeing this situation as I'm trying so desperately to describe what the mindset, what the process is. I certainly can't imagine it any more deeply than just my own personal experience because I've not been there, but I'm doing my best to grasp what the thought process is of a young person who ends up being ostracized by their family and then contemplates how they're going to kill themselves. It's so dark and so bad that they're wondering: should I do it? How do you kill yourself? If you're a young person who is 16 or 17, do you think that maybe it's pills? Jumping off the High Level Bridge? It's tough. It's tough to think about that, but that's what we're thinking about: it's young people dying.

Madam Chair, I am really, really concerned that if we don't pass this amendment to re-establish the legitimacy of these GSAs in the minds of those young people who are contemplating the most dark and black options any human being could ever contemplate, there are going to be a growing number of young people who end up adding to the body count of individuals who've already died as a result of not having GSAs in the past in this province. That will be deeply troubling, and I don't look forward to that at all.

I hope that the members opposite see their way clear to try to put themselves in the mindset of those young people who are so terribly conflicted and facing the most tragic decisions of their life without the support of the government, whose primary responsibility is to help save lives. That lifesaver is being withdrawn from them by the GSA legislation proposed by this government. This amendment to re-establish legitimacy of the GSAs is essential not only for saving lives, as I say, but for preventing death.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Any other members? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment, that I absolutely will support. Thank you for the comments, actually. You know, we heard for years, when we sat on that side, when we heard from the opposition, that one of the jobs was to try to make legislation better. One of the things that I've been hearing from constituents is that the thing that we fixed previously was removing the ability of administrators or principals

to delay in any way the creation of a QSA or a GSA so that there wasn't any mechanism for people in positions of power to delay these decisions, that are actually quite important.

This amendment, really, allows the government an opportunity. If indeed their goal is to create safe spaces for students and to create a mechanism for these clubs to be allowed and to be supported, then why not clarify that for our kids, for our students, for their families, and for their allies? What we're hearing is that, again, we're going to go backwards with this legislation, without an amendment like this, so that there is the ability for administrators to put in delays. Like the previous member said, there are some huge risks associated with that.

This last weekend in St. Albert we celebrated pride. It was our fourth celebration, and I think it was our biggest celebration. We had hundreds and hundreds, maybe thousands of people. I'm not sure. I didn't count. We had a lot of people come out. What was really interesting is that we didn't have just people from St. Albert. We had people come over and tell us that they were coming in from Morinville. I met some people that had come in from Westlock. They wanted to come into a place that was a safe place to celebrate with their friends and their family, to be in a place that just celebrated their uniqueness, really. It was a lot of fun.

One of the things that we did at our tent was that we actually did face painting, which is a lot of fun. It's a good way to meet families, especially to interact with kids, and what's not fun about that? I had a lot of students, probably junior high, early high school, and some of the people were coming up and asking me to paint different flags on their faces, all different flags, all different colours. I learned what all the colours were in the different flags. It was kind of fun. There was a lot of pride, actually, and it kind of reinforced to me what pride means. They were really proud to have these colours on their faces: “You know, I identify as this” and “I identify as this” and “This is my flag, and I'm quite happy to have it painted on my face.”

As I was doing that, I met four young ladies who were junior high students from a school in St. Albert called Lorne Akins. Maybe some of the members remember that I tabled some letters earlier this session. They were written, I think, on May 3, and I received them. There were 60 letters from junior high students in St. Albert. Some of them were addressed to the Premier, and some of them were addressed: to whom it may concern. They were specifically about GSAs and some of their fears around changes to legislation or changes to policy or regulations that would impede the speedy and safe creation of a GSA or a QSA.

What was really interesting about the letters was that some of the students talked about the fact that they themselves identified in that community as a member of that community. They talked about the fear that they had of being forced or having their families find out before they were ready, and they talked about some of the harm that would come to their family and to themselves and to their lives. Some of the students talked about the fact that they were just allies and that they were concerned for their friends.

These were based on conversations that friends have, that junior high students have together. They spend a lot of time together, and they talk. They were really passionate. To see these young students, junior high students, talking about how important this was – they felt that we were finally making progress, and they were really frightened that this would go backwards.

Now, you know, we've heard the government say: well, there's nothing to worry about. Well, there is something to worry about, because when you create loopholes in rules and legislation and regulations, sometimes people take advantage of that. Not everybody, but sometimes people take advantage of that. I think that if we can create legislation and regulations that close those loopholes or that create truly safe spaces or create rules so that we

can know that we are doing the absolute best that we can to prevent any harm to any people, then I think we're doing a good job.

10:40

The reality of LGBTQ students: I don't know; I wasn't one of those students. When I went to school – that was a long time ago now – I know that I witnessed in the schools that I went to bullying of students that were clearly members of that community, that looked different, that spoke differently, that maybe shared who they were. They were bullied as a result. I have heard of kids getting beaten up. I've certainly heard of kids getting kicked out of their homes. I think we all probably have. If we're honest with ourselves, we know that this is a risk that these students face. Why not do everything that we can to prevent any harm coming to these students?

I said earlier this week, or last week now, when we talked about the private member's bill around ensuring that we had medication in schools for students with severe allergies, that it's important to make that investment, to ensure that even if we save one child with this legislation and with this financial investment, then we will have done our job to prevent harm to or the death of one child. It's not that different. If this amendment to this legislation has the potential to save a life or to close a loophole and eventually save a life, that doesn't seem like a bad idea. We know that suicide, ultimately, is the end, but there are all of these horrible things that happen before that. We have mental illnesses. We have students that struggle with depression and all of the results of bullying, being ostracized, not being accepted by your family, being homeless, all of those things. I think we can understand what that does to a young person.

Ultimately, the risk of suicide is a very real risk. We know that suicide is the second-leading cause of death among youth 15 to 24 and the third-leading cause of death in young people between 10 and 14. Again, I think that if you can save the life of one person, what is the harm in that? If truly your goal in this legislation is not to make changes that will be harmful to these students, then why not make this change? Why not make this amendment if you can prevent one death? Suicide is a horrific fact, and it happens all too frequently with our young people. We know that. We invest in mental health supports. We invest in prevention. We do everything we can to prevent harm from coming to our children. We vaccinate them. We teach them about safety. We use seat belts. We use car seats. We do everything that we possibly can to prevent harm from coming to our children. Why not do this? When it gets to the point of suicide, it's too late. There's nothing else you can do.

Twenty years ago my brother, who struggled with a mental illness and as far as I know didn't identify himself as being part of the LGBTQ community, for whatever reason saw that suicide was the only option for him, and that's what he did. He ended his life, and that was it. There was nothing I could do about it after that, and it's final. If there was something that could have been done along the way to have prevented that – and that's a question I've always asked myself since then – I would love to turn back time and to have done that.

So I would encourage these members to think about, beyond the legislation, just an individual child that might be a constituent of yours. If there is something that you could do that you know would save a life, that you know would close a loophole that maybe somehow somebody would use that would delay the creation of a club where a child could go to feel supported, to feel included, and to be able to navigate their lives, which are kind of complex when you're a student, if there's anything that you could do to fix that, to change that, to prevent that, why wouldn't you do this?

That is all I have to say about this. I would encourage everybody to seriously think about this, about the lives of the children in your constituency.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment, which, of course, as you can imagine, I wholly support. My comments are going to actually be quite brief because what I'm going to do is that I'm going to create the conditions such that should somebody decide to vote against this amendment, it's going to be because they're blatantly and purposely ignoring it.

In my time before being an elected official in this House, I spent many years in the labour movement. My job was to make sure that my membership was treated with dignity and respect, that they were treated fairly, that they got a fair wage, and that all revolved around language. Language is everything. When you look at a union contract, if you change one little word in that – if you will do something, that means that's going to happen, but if you may do something, well, that's up in the air.

Earlier this evening I did hear the Minister of Education talk about how schools are expected to follow the policy. Language. That tells me there is no guarantee that they will follow the language. Now, if you had said that the schools will follow the policy, that is more of a guarantee. I'm going to maybe borrow a little line that I've heard before. What this amendment will do is take weak language that we have right now and make it less weak, okay?

We have gotten caught in a little bit of a loop here, where we've been trying to compare the language around GSAs proposed in this bill to other language across the country, and we've explored this. What we haven't seemed to concentrate on is comparing this language to what we have right now. Right now the language that we have – and I thank the Member for Edmonton-North West for, in his job as the Education minister, putting together Bill 24. It was the strongest language in the country. But what we're doing with this proposed language here is making ourselves just part of the pack. Why should we settle for that? We should be settling for the best, the best language. If we're so intent to not use the best language, this amendment here will make weak language less weak. As we read this, we know this improves it. So to ignore it means we're doing that purposely.

So I encourage all members: don't ignore this. Strengthen the language. Make it less weak. And let's give our kids some certainty that their elected officials really are on their side because right now they don't think so.

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak?

Shall I call the question on amendment A1?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:49 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Dach	Goehring	Renaud
Dang	Loyola	Schmidt

Eggen	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Feehan	Pancholi	Sweet
Against the motion:		
Allard	LaGrange	Reid
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Loewen	Rutherford
Copping	Long	Schow
Ellis	Milliken	Schulz
Fir	Nally	Schweitzer
Getson	Neudorf	Shandro
Glubish	Nicolaides	Toews
Goodridge	Nixon, Jason	Toor
Gotfried	Nixon, Jeremy	van Dijken
Guthrie	Panda	Williams
Issik	Pon	
Totals:	For – 12	Against – 32

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, we are now back on the main. Are there any hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you Madam Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to rise in the Chamber this evening. I do have a couple of comments that I would like to express to the House this evening. I've been listening to the debate with great interest. I do appreciate all hon. members participating in the process. I still become alarmed as I listen to the opposition continue to misrepresent the facts when it comes to Bill 8, in presentation after presentation to talk about things that just aren't part of the bill, to represent things inside this place that do not fit with the legislation. They're not factual in their presentation.

Why I think that is so unfortunate, primarily, is for LGBTQ youth who are watching this or listening to this in other capacities as we watch the debate develop around Bill 8. They continue to see the Official Opposition rise in this Chamber and make implications that in the end, Madam Chair, are not found within fact. They have chosen to spend a tremendous amount of their time in their conversation with Bill 8. I don't actually have the direct copy of Bill 8 in front of me at the moment, Madam Chair, but it's a fairly decent-sized piece of legislation. I've heard no comments from the Official Opposition on that piece of legislation except for one topic, which, quite frankly, is not within that piece of legislation, and the topic that they're referring to, GSAs and the ability of youth inside schools to be able to form a GSA, does not change as a result of that legislation despite the fact that the Official Opposition continues to want to rise in this Chamber and present that as a fact.

You know, Madam Chair, I think it's important that we are clear yet again that even if Bill 8 passes in this Chamber – I would not want to presume what the Assembly will decide in the coming days, though I have to say that nothing the opposition has presented has changed my mind. At this point I still intend to vote on behalf of the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre in support of Bill 8, the hon. the Education minister's piece of legislation. But what I want to talk about are the steps that actually happen around GSAs. I've spoken about it a few times along the way in regard to Bill 8, but I think it bears repeating for the record what will take place, still, when it comes to gay-straight alliances or queer-straight alliances or those types of student organizations within a school even after Bill 8 passes.

Again, Madam Chair, this is what would happen. Step 1, the students or a student will ask a staff member at the school to start a GSA.

Step 2, the principal permits a GSA. We're already at step 2, and the entire argument that the Official Opposition has presented in this Chamber for weeks has fallen apart just at step 2.

Step 3, the principal designates a staff liaison to support the GSA. The Official Opposition has presented a lot of commentary this evening about the need to make sure that principals would designate somebody in authority or of the staff within the school to be able to support a GSA. Again, you can see right here that by step 3 that would still continue under Bill 8.

The Official Opposition continues to struggle with the facts, Madam Chair. I know that my constituents find that frustrating, and I'm sure the constituents of Airdrie-East will probably find that frustrating as well. I know in my experience, when I visit the great constituency of Airdrie, that they do like the facts.

Step 4, the students – the students, Madam Chair – select a group name, not the government, not the teachers, not the Official Opposition; the students who are forming the gay-straight alliance select the name. Extremely different than what the Official Opposition continues to present in this place.

Step 5, if the principal cannot find a staff liaison, the principal informs both the board, so the school board, and the minister, the hon. the Education minister, and then the minister appoints a responsible adult. So it will still go as far as that if the school principal is unable to appoint a designated staff liaison for that GSA, the minister would then become responsible to have to make sure it happened. It has to happen, and she would have to deal with that. Again, step 5, right there, clear as day, and the Official Opposition continues to struggle with the facts and, instead, Madam Chair, spends their time when they're supposed to be in here speaking about issues that are relevant to the legislation, quite frankly, basically inventing things that have nothing to do with the legislation and things that are certainly not found within fact.

Step 6 is that as a student-led group the students, with support from their staff liaison, plan the next steps such as meeting dates, times, and activities. Madam Chair, the students – it's very important that we're clear on that – plan the next steps such as meeting dates, times, and activities.

So the students get to decide if there's a GSA. The principal is to accommodate that and he must get a staffperson that could help them accommodate that. The students choose the title or the name of what that group would look like. And then the students decide the next steps such as meeting dates, times, and activities.

Madam Chair, I know that you've been in the chair for much of the debate during this legislation. I would not want to speak of when you may or may not be in the House. You've heard the arguments that have been given by the Official Opposition, that contradict significantly – significantly – what they're saying with the reality that is actually inside this legislation.

Again, in six steps, Madam Chair – in six steps – a GSA is formed. Nowhere along the way do any of the things that the opposition have presented in this place take place. Their arguments are not found in facts.

I think, at its core, Madam Chair, that it comes down to, quite frankly, an inability to act as the Official Opposition in this place. What I've seen in the last few weeks, as the Official Opposition adjusts to their new role inside this Chamber, is a complete inability to be able to act as the Official Opposition on behalf of the people of Alberta, instead spending their time focusing on things that are just not factual, not spending their time on debating legislation, improving legislation, and working to do their constitutional role as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in this place. I think that's disappointing.

11:00

I know it's disappointing to many Albertans that I speak to. I spoke a few times this week about being back home this weekend. I know you made it home this weekend as well, Madam Chair. We had, of course, the Sundre rodeo, one of my favourite events of the year, where my community gets to come together. Often as I spoke to hundreds of people throughout the weekend, they brought up their concern that the NDP just could not rise to the ability of being the Official Opposition. I think you see it, time and time again, that they've lost – you know, they don't understand what their role is inside this Chamber.

But clearly, in my opinion, speaking as a former Leader of the Official Opposition inside this very Chamber, that is not what their role is. You served in the Official Opposition. You know, Madam Chair, that this is not the role of the Official Opposition, to come here and focus on facts that are not accurate, focus on spreading inaccurate facts and causing deep concern for a whole section of our society, namely LGBTQ youth, telling them that they will not have GSAs despite the fact that that's just not the reality of what this piece of legislation would do, when and if this House puts it into law.

At its core, Madam Chair – we spoke about it often inside this Chamber – this comes down to the fact that the NDP are frustrated. They're angry. They're disappointed, and I respect that they're disappointed. It had to be hard on April 16 to be fired by the people of Alberta and to go into the Official Opposition benches as the only one-term government in the history of this province. It had to hurt. I respect that. But the reality is that they have to accept the judgment of the people of Alberta, stop focusing on being angry, stop focusing on misconceptions and misrepresenting facts inside this Chamber and instead focus on their role as the Official Opposition and help to do the important work of this Chamber to make strong legislation and make sure that the laws that we pass inside this place end up being the best for Albertans.

The Official Opposition: tonight, Madam Chair, as they go home shortly, I hope that they reflect on that and reflect on what their role is in the history of this place and what their responsibilities are to Albertans because what I have witnessed over the last few weeks is certainly not Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition doing her job. Now, I would not want to presume how Her Majesty feels about Her Loyal Opposition – that would be against the standing orders – but I've got to tell you that if I was sitting outside of this Chamber, not even being in this Chamber, I would be disappointed in the Official Opposition and questioning whether or not the Leader of the

Official Opposition and her caucus are up to the task, the important task that they've been given by the people of Alberta.

Hopefully, I just want to encourage them, through you, Madam Chair, to take some time to reflect on that and to try to rise to the responsibility and the privilege that they've been given. It's a privilege for us to have been given the opportunity to form Her Majesty's government. We recognize that. It is a privilege for the United Conservative Party to have been given this responsibility. We recognize that. We intend to work very, very hard and earn that privilege. But it's also a privilege to have been given the opportunity to form Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition inside this Chamber. I think the members should take that seriously.

As such, I want to give them an opportunity to do that before we continue with any more debate on Bill 8, and as such I will move to adjourn debate on Bill 8 and rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Mr. Milliken:** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 8. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

**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.

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. First off, I'm rising pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2), the Brian Mason standing order, if I may, to advise this Assembly that there will be no morning sitting tomorrow, which is Thursday, June 27. I just want to make sure I have that right. In addition to that, there will be no morning sitting, pursuant to the same standing order, on Tuesday, July 2.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn the Legislative Assembly of Alberta until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:06 p.m.]





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