



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, July 3, 2019

Day 23

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

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

First Session

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Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)  
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Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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| Jason Luan           | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions                                  |
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Yao

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Schmidt  
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Singh  
Smith  
Turton  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 3, 2019

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

**The Acting Speaker:** Please be seated.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They say that if you seek it, sometimes you will get it. I would like to ask for unanimous consent of the House to have one-minute bells for the entire evening, including during the points when we are in Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent denied]

### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

#### Bill 13 Alberta Senate Election Act

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any questions or comments? We are currently on amendment A2.

**Mr. Bilous:** Can I ask, Mr. Chair, for clarity on which amendment A2 is, please?

**The Deputy Chair:** Yes, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. The amendment was earlier read into the official record by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Bilous:** If I can just clarify, is that the amendment, Mr. Chair, that deals with the election advertising expenses of \$20,000, or is that the lengthy amendment?

**The Deputy Chair:** It's the lengthy one.

**Mr. Bilous:** The lengthy one. Yeah. Okay. Excellent.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thanks.

**Mr. Bilous:** Okay. I rise to speak to this amendment. I'm just confirming that I in fact have the correct speaking notes, which I believe I do. This is an amendment that removes the ability to hold a senatorial election during a municipal election, I believe.

**The Deputy Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

There are a number of challenges that we have and I have, quite frankly, with the idea of this coinciding with the 2021 municipal election because we have senatorial candidates that are endorsed by provincial parties, which is bringing provincial politics into municipal elections. Now, we all know that in the province of Alberta with our municipal elections there are no party affiliations, at least not formally, with any of the candidates that run.

The other thing that's challenging about this is that provincial political parties that have endorsed a candidate also can spend up to \$100,000 per candidate on political advertising. That is a significant amount of money. That is going to significantly influence voters during this election. I mean, essentially what that does is that if you

had a number of different political parties that all endorsed the same candidate, we're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars that could be spent. Now, that's in addition already to, I believe, the \$1.5 million that candidates themselves would be allowed to spend.

You know, what we're trying to do through a series of amendments on this side of the House, Mr. Chair, is to ensure that big money does not come creeping back into elections. Quite frankly, the way that this bill is currently written, it's not that it's creeping in; there's a gaping hole that we're driving semi trucks through in order to influence voters. These are no small sums of money.

I think that this amendment is reasonable in the sense that this is a dangerous first step, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, in fundamentally changing how municipal elections are funded, how they operate within our province. I can tell you that I've spoken with dozens and dozens of municipal candidates who enjoy the fact that there is a separation between federal-provincial politics or partisan or party politics with municipal politics. We're going down a dangerous road with this bill in its current state, the way it's currently written.

Now, I think part of the reason why our government's first bill, Bill 1, that we introduced was to ban corporate and union donations. That was, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, because we believe that a person should get elected based on their merit, not based on the depth of their pockets. We know that advertising and fundraising greatly influence and can influence voters through a number of different means, but I think Albertans, one, will be very curious to know why these certain provisions in this bill currently exist. I'm not sure if we've had members of the front bench jump up to respond to some of our questions and concerns when it comes to this bill directly.

I think Albertans, you know, need a bit of an answer or an explanation from this government as to why they are creating loopholes to be able to give those who do have deeper pockets a significant opportunity to influence senatorial elections. If you add up the amount of money that is allowed through a number of different sections of this bill, it's well over a million dollars, Mr. Chair, which is a significant amount of money influencing voters for an individual, single Senator election. I mean, there are other concerns I have with the bill in its current state, but I'll keep, for the time being, my comments to this amendment. But I can tell you that, again, with our Bill 1 we heard loud and clear from Albertans that they wanted big money out of politics.

Now, again, whether that comes from a business or from a union – we could have, when we were government, banned one of those in order to benefit ourselves but said: “No. You know what? We need to level the playing field for donations in general and put a cap on it.” Obviously, money is needed to be able to purchase signs and other forms of advertising, but, again, without a cap it becomes, really, a race of who can raise the most amount of money. Suddenly now for those candidates that want to run, run for the right reasons, run and want the race to be based on merit, they are often at a disadvantage because if they can't raise or don't have the backing of a political party to be able to have access to hundreds of thousand of dollars that political parties can now spend during a senatorial race – I think it sets a very dangerous precedent, Mr. Chair. I also think that it's taking us down a path that I know for sure that Albertans would be curious to know why this government is adamant on doing this.

But, as well, at the moment the Senate elections in Alberta: I mean, it's a bit of a joke, Mr. Chair, because the federal government appoints Senators regardless of who is elected or not. But an election costs money. I always find it interesting when you have a Conservative party or government looking at ways of spending more tax dollars in one breath yet criticizing us in another of having spent too much. Yet, this very bill will put Albertans and taxpayers

on the hook for millions of dollars for an election that doesn't amount to anything because they're appointed. And even if it did, it's a pretty interesting dynamic that it's a one time in your lifetime election. Once you're elected once, you're there until you're 75. Well, that doesn't really seem that democratic. That doesn't seem like the folks that are elected to the Senate are beholden to their very voters. They are the first time. So say whatever you want to get the election, and then once you're elected, you can do whatever you want. Your actions and words can be completely incongruent because there's nothing holding you accountable to the very people who put you there.

7:40 p.m.

I mean, there are a number of challenges with this bill. I'm not surprised, quite frankly, at all that this bill is coming from our current Premier, who, you know, at every turn is trying to bring Ottawa to Alberta. I think he might be better off going back the other way as opposed to trying to bring it all here to this province.

The Senate has a number of challenges, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, I mean, from some of the challenges that we've seen in the Senate's actions, especially around bills that are hurting our province, to the fact that there's an unequal distribution of seats and appointments across the country. Alberta is home to I believe it's over 4.4 million people, more than, I believe, all of the Maritimes combined, yet they have more Senators appointed than Alberta does. So are we not, in fact, legitimizing a very process that discriminates against Alberta? You know, my hope is that members opposite will look into this with real interest because we are legitimizing a process that is flawed to begin with.

Again, you know, these Senators aren't necessarily beholden to the people that they represent because they're appointed for life, and they're appointed based on the Prime Minister. I appreciate that the government loves to talk about how former Prime Minister Harper appointed the Senators who won their elections. Well, in Alberta, maybe. In other provinces he did not, so there's nothing holding whoever is Prime Minister. Now, maybe this is a nice little bill that the government is hoping to tee up with their fingers crossed that Andrew Scheer will become the Prime Minister. But having said that, even if he did, he's under no obligation to follow this act, which has no enforcement mechanism but spends Alberta dollars and opens up these senatorial elections to, really, you know, a hyperpartisan political party election where whoever has the most money is going to significantly influence the very voters and who they're going to choose.

You know, my hope is that members will consider this amendment. I know our caucus has brought forward a number of amendments on this bill, but I think these are really valid concerns that we're trying to raise with this bill as it's currently written. Again, this is a blatant attempt at bringing big money back into politics. My question to the government is: what is the larger, broader plan? Is this step 1 in trying to bring big dollars back into politics to influence the outcome of elections? If it is, I think Albertans deserve to know.

With that, I'm hoping my colleagues will join me in asking some of these questions and sharing their comments. I encourage the government to respond to some of these questions. I'd love to have some answers and have some of my concerns quelled. With that, I will take my seat, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has stood to speak.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Yes. I've watched this bill with interest. I think certainly we heard, or some of us

heard, the comments from the minister of justice with respect to this particular update. I actually think that this particular amendment adds something to the bill. I have broader concerns about Senate elections or the way they're structured in this bill, but I think my specific concerns around this amendment, which I will deal with first, relate to the fact that it's not totally clear how this is going to function.

I think one of the things worth noting is on municipalities. There's provincial legislation that governs how municipalities run their elections, but within that legislation municipalities have a certain amount of movement, so they don't all do it the same. The exact formats of elections in Calgary and Edmonton, for example, are not identical. While municipal elections will occur throughout the province at the same time and with the same sort of set of guidelines, the rules will be a little bit different from place to place. What I wonder is: will that add complication and cost if we're having Senate elections at the same time? Obviously, the Senate elections would have to be identical throughout the province, which means that if, say, for instance, Calgary and Edmonton have slightly different rules around exactly how they're holding their municipal elections, then the Senate elections can't simply mirror the elections in a municipality because the Senate elections would have to be the same.

We know that municipal elections sometimes differ in certain technical ways from one another. Now, these aren't huge, major differences, but I think they're enough of a difference that it would drive cost relative to, say, having a senatorial election at the same time as a provincial election, because the provincial election is of course held the same throughout the province. I think that is one of the biggest concerns.

I am also concerned that in addition to the additional cost associated with the fact that they won't be able to perfectly mirror what's going on in terms of the municipal elections, I'd also say that I'm concerned that just the fact that different organizations are holding the elections themselves may drive costs. It's not really clear. The devil with these things is always in the details, and it's not totally clear to me exactly how this will be rolled out. Will the same officers in the same locations who are counting municipal ballots be counting senatorial ballots, and if, like I said, the rules are slightly different in Edmonton than they are in Calgary in terms of voting, how will that be accounted for?

Will the rules be different for the senatorial election, or will they be the same throughout the province? It seems to me that they must be the same throughout the province, so I'm a little concerned that we'll add additional personnel in there for additional costs. If I recall correctly, the last time we held senatorial elections, they cost about \$2 million. Of course, as with all things, the cost of that will have gone up over time. That's probably – what? – \$3 million, \$4 million. But now we're doing it on a municipal election, so that probably drives the cost even higher. I wonder at spending that kind of money to achieve a very uncertain outcome. That's one of the concerns that I definitely have about rejecting this particular amendment. Yeah, I think this is a little bit odd.

I also am concerned about the fact that elections generate a lot of media. There's a lot of focus on them. There's a lot of sort of messaging going back and forth, and I'm a little concerned that this generates a lot of interference for people who are trying to pay attention during an election. I perhaps ascribe – I don't want to say in an old-fashioned way – to a version that exists more in people's heads than it does in reality, but I would like to think that when people go to vote, they read platforms and consider questions, and they ask their candidates questions when they come to their house at the door. It was often my experience that when I arrived at people's doors, they were surprised by my arrival and therefore

didn't have questions prepared, but some of them would e-mail questions afterwards, or some of them had questions at the ready. I think that that's an important part of democracy.

My concern is that you have sort of municipal issues going on over here, and then you have senatorial stuff going on over here, and I'm concerned that that's a lot of noise and interference all at the same time. It's a lot for people to process all at once, and I'm concerned that there could be some cross-pollination that would have an impact on the senatorial elections and have an impact on the municipal elections, potentially an impact that's unfair.

I mean, it's very I don't want to say confusing, but I think that sometimes it's difficult to understand different levels of government and what their jurisdiction is. I frequently got questions, when I went door-knocking, about local traffic issues that were within municipal jurisdictions. I suspect that all members of this House have had that same experience. My concern is that we'll have candidates running on things that are outside of their jurisdiction. We see this sometimes even in provincial politics with respect to candidates, parties, ministers running on amending legislation that isn't theirs. For instance, here in the province, obviously, we don't have jurisdiction over the Criminal Code; that's the federal government. I'm quite concerned that people will run on issues that they can't actually impact and that that will occur because those two things are happening simultaneously.

7:50 p.m.

I think my larger concerns with respect to this and one of the reasons that this amendment would be good, because it would push things off a little further and maybe we wouldn't need to pass this legislation immediately, have to do with the fact – in my view, one of the points of elections is accountability. One of the most important things that elections generate is accountability. We must all be accountable to the public because we will come back before them to be rehired or not rehired again in another four years. Having senatorial elections, while it is an election, the problem is that once that person is elected, they're just in forever, so it doesn't have that same impact in terms of generating accountability, and I think that that's a pretty big concern.

Also, if you look at Alberta, it has – what? – I think six Senators. That's a very low number, especially relative to our population sort of relative to the rest of the country. I mean, I think there are some Maritime provinces that have 10, so that's a bit unequal. I'm a little concerned that this adds legitimacy to a thing that – I mean, it is legitimate. It's in the Constitution. But it adds a sort of veneer of democracy to a thing that really isn't that democratic. That's, I think, my concern with the idea that we're going to have these elections. We're going to elect a Senator, but then a Senator will be there indefinitely. At that point they lose the accountability, which is, in my view, sort of the point of elections, generating that accountability to the public. I don't think that this does that. So that's a big concern.

Some of my other concerns: this is a very lengthy piece of legislation. We have managed to identify a problem and actually work with the minister – and I have to say: kudos for that – in order to have an amendment accepted that fixes a problem that existed with this bill. When we look at the totals, the amount that people are allowed to spend on elections, like, we're talking about half a million dollars per Senator. That's pretty pricey. I mean, by comparison, each individual candidate in their local riding in a provincial election is permitted to spend \$50,000, so that's one-tenth. You're talking about a single candidate spending 10 times what a provincial candidate would be able to spend. That's a lot of money, and I think it's a concern in terms of sort of the creeping in of unnecessary influence and undue influence from those who have

deeper pockets, particularly in light of the fact that these are people who, again, raise that half a million dollars, potentially make promises they ought not make, get in, and feel beholden to their donors. But they aren't really accountable to the electorate because they're not up for re-election. I think that, yeah, it's a big concern.

We're also looking at: a provincial party can transfer up to \$100,000 to a candidate. But then the question with that becomes: well, if a provincial party runs a whole slate of candidates, is it \$100,000 in total, or is it \$100,000 for each candidate? I think that's concerning because it's sort of doing indirectly what one cannot do directly in a lot of ways. What happens to that money at the end? If, say, the individual doesn't spend it all, does it return to a political party? I think that's a concern as well.

Again, I mean, this is a very hefty piece of legislation. It's being billed as just doing this one simple thing, but I think it's a little bit more complicated than that. I think that the people of Alberta deserve sort of some time to weigh in and to consider this and to consider the impact that it will have, especially, again, in light of the fact that we're talking about spending a lot of money and potentially, you know, people donating a lot of money to run an election that ultimately may or may not have any impact on anything. At the end of the day, there's no requirement that the federal government respect this.

Honestly, in a lot of ways, I think that one of the bigger problems with the Senate is that it's sort of disproportionate in the sense that the number of Senators that Alberta has relative to its population is low, so we don't have as much of a voice as we should have. I feel that sort of adding this democratic veneer to that maybe doesn't address that problem. Now, obviously, that problem can't be addressed here. It can't be addressed by the provincial Legislature. It's an issue at the federal level, so I think, you know, to me, that continues to be an issue.

Returning to the amendment, again, one of the concerns that I have is this cross-pollination of issues. You have Senators running and talking about federal issues at the same time that you have municipal councillors running and talking about municipal issues. Again, it's not immediately obvious to folks in all instances what level of government has their concern, so I have a little bit of a concern about sort of cross-pollination, about those people getting confused about which issues belong with which politicians. Sometimes politicians play to that – we certainly see that with respect to the provincial government and the Criminal Code – and I think that's concerning.

Ultimately, at the end of the day, I actually think that we all benefit from a transparent democracy. I genuinely believe that the more open conversations we can have about issues and about governance, the better our province will be. Now, I think there are a lot of reasons why that doesn't maybe occur quite as well as it could. Certainly, it's the case that we have sort of fewer reporters tending to report on more issues. It makes it challenging to sort of get as in depth as maybe one might like, so that's a concern. Certainly, people sometimes have a bit of a tendency to prefer to boil issues down to short statements when, in fact, the issue itself is quite complex, and that can have an unfortunate impact.

Really, at the end of the day, we often have sort of people – I, of course, do tend to see growing income inequality as one of the greatest challenges of our time. One of the things that that generates is a lot of people who are working a lot of hours, trying to get their kids from here to there. They often live a long way from where they work, so there's a long commute involved. They're having to work more than one job sometimes to make ends meet and to support their family, and that makes it sometimes more challenging for them to engage in a great deal of depth on an issue. I actually think that if we were in a position where everybody had that ability to

engage in those issues in greater depth, we might see some solutions to some problems that we have. I mean, one can't of course completely get rid of the influence of the country immediately to the south of us, that has some very challenging politics.

To sum up, I think some of the questions that I would like to have answered are around how we keep those two things separate when we're running these two things at the same time, mostly around cost, around whether or not the cost is going to be driven, and around the particulars of how we have a common election, that occurs throughout the province, while we have elections occurring under slightly different procedures in different municipalities. I think that it would be reassuring in terms of the answers that we could potentially have.

I'm also, like I said, concerned about the dollars and the movement of dollars back and forth between different entities and just the volume, the half a million dollars. I think that's quite a significant amount of money. Admittedly, these individuals are running throughout the province, but it still seems like a very high amount of money. I'm also concerned about the idea of donations coming in from political parties during that cycle.

Those are some of the concerns that I have with this bill and with the rejection of this amendment specifically.

I think that, with that, I will close my comments. I'm sure that some of my colleagues have additional comments to make.

8:00 p.m.

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

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to speak.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment before us this evening. I'm not going to speak for a great deal of time. I know that my personal views on the Senate are ones that I've held for a long, long time. Bottom line: I don't think much of the Senate in terms of its function in our democracy. I think it's a very broken House, the upper Chamber. In my personal view, it should be abolished. However, where we're at right now with it, it's a very complex issue.

At the moment here in the Alberta Legislature we're considering an amendment to a piece of legislation which reinstates Senate elections for nominees in the province. The amendment before us basically looks to eliminate the coincidental occurrence of municipal elections and the senatorial election. The mixing of the two, I think, is a dangerous precedent.

Really, I'm quite grateful that we in this province so far haven't had our municipal elections completely imbued with party politics. I think it's a very positive thing. It's sort of knocking on the door of becoming more and more partisan directly and in name. So far municipal elections in Alberta are not flavoured by party politics to the extent that many jurisdictions are, and I think we should keep it that way. It's healthy. There are other jurisdictions in the country which are also forming their decisions by consensus rather than partisan party views, such as the NWT council, the Northwest Territories council. That works very well.

Party politics being introduced into the municipal elections in our country would be, I think, a very sad event to occur. The twinning of the two elections would go a long way to making that happen and to marrying the principle of party politics to municipal politics and vice versa, and for that reason, I think that this amendment is a very wise effort at countering the movement towards party politics becoming part and parcel of municipal elections in Alberta. It would be a very simple thing for us to adopt this amendment and eliminate the possibility for the coincidental election of a Senator nominee during municipal elections, and I think that's what we

should do. If we look at what the results of that might be if indeed we did go down this road and had a senatorial nominee election coincidentally with municipal elections, you're going to end up having a mixing of the two, and you're going to end up seeing party politics get involved in slates of municipal councillors. Smaller municipalities will be even more deeply affected. It's the wrong path to go down.

So I'm very much supportive of the amendment to eliminate the mixing of senatorial elections with municipal elections. I'm very much opposed to reinstating the whole concept of electing senatorial nominees because, of course, as I mentioned, my views on the Senate are ones that are not wholly supportive of that body continuing in its present form, as a supposed Chamber of sober second thought in the country.

There have been some changes that have taken place in the Senate with the current Prime Minister eliminating party bonds from members of the Senate who had been appointed by Liberal Prime Ministers, releasing those bonds. We'll see the effects of that over time. By and large, I'm kind of half interested only in what takes place in the machinations of the Senate and what indeed the nominees may accomplish or may not accomplish if they happen to be appointed by the Prime Minister of the day to actually join the Senate to represent Alberta regionally in the Senate.

The Premier knows full well that no bill will give him the power to appoint Senators on behalf of the province. It's totally federal jurisdiction. Of the 10 nominees that have so far been presented, I think only half have actually been appointed to the Senate. I know that the Premier's explanation or justification for putting forward the bill in the legislation to reimplement the nomination of Senators by election is to try to ensure that Alberta Senators are more beholden to a province-friendly position, one that perhaps may favour the government of the day. I don't know if that's a reasonable expectation given that the appointments are not made by the Premier and that there's no second election that these Senators will have to face. It's simply one and done, so these Senators, once elected, will follow their own particular viewpoint on a given issue of the day, and there are no means of holding them to account. The accountability isn't there because it's an appointment and not an actual election, and there lies the difficulty that I have with the federal Senate.

It's a bit of a conundrum when you think of how embedded the Senate is into our Constitution and into our democracy. To envision how one in future might actually do away with that upper Chamber is a very complex issue. There have been lots of legal minds applied to it. There are unicameral legislatures federally in many places in the world which work just fine, but to disentangle oneself from a bicameral federal legislature to enter into a unicameral system would be one of the most complex things that a government and a legislative structure could potentially do.

We've basically muddled through in this country with the Senate that we have, hoping that the individuals who are appointed to it have our best interests in mind. By and large, I believe that the individuals who are appointed to the Senate do have the best interests of the country in mind. If you look at the quality of the individuals, largely they are people of high stature and are very learned. In fact, you know, the body to which they're appointed is the problem; it's structurally ineffective.

You know, many argue that it does accomplish a lot. I know that former Senator Tommy Banks, who was a very, very beloved individual here in Alberta, in Edmonton in particular, thought very highly of the Senate and spoke and wrote very deeply about his commitment to the work that the Senate did. There are others like him who were very passionately devoted to the concept that the work of the Senate was integral to the democracy that we have in

this country. However, as I mentioned before, I don't share that view. I don't believe the Senate is a body that adds on a net basis to our democracy because, of course, it's an appointed body. Therefore, legitimizing the whole process by having senatorial nominee elections is something that I don't support in principle.

**8:10 p.m.**

But, as I mentioned, given that we're now faced with a piece of legislation that we're trying to amend, Bill 13, we're speaking about an amendment which will, I think, make the bill better by eliminating the possibility of senatorial nominee elections being held at the same time as municipal elections across the province. It basically has a negative effect on the municipal election process, and it would be damaging unnecessarily. I don't believe that anyone who seriously thinks about the process of municipal elections in Alberta would think that putting these two together, the Senate nominee election in conjunction with the municipal election, is something that will lead to anything but a devolution of party politics into the process of the municipal elections in the province.

I've been involved in some municipal elections. I mentioned before that my grandmother was involved as a deputy mayor of her village for many years, and she ran regularly. She did have her own political party roots, but they never flavoured what she actually did when she ran as a municipal candidate. She was dedicated to the whole village that she ran in and was elected multiple times. In fact, the time when she didn't get elected, she ended up leaving town. My Uncle Bill didn't vote. She lost by one vote. She could have killed him, but she pulled up stakes and left town. It wasn't because of political affiliation that she won or lost that election because political affiliation didn't come into the picture.

I'm fearful that had there been senatorial nominee elections occurring at the same time as some of the municipal elections that my grandmother ran in and won, except for the last one of course, then we might have already seen party politics completely flavouring the municipal elections in Alberta.

Many people in this House have been councillors and reeves and mayors and deputy mayors and so forth, and many people who are listening to this debate right now are former elected officials from councils and counties, which should actually cause them to think seriously about what effect the municipal elections being run in conjunction with the senatorial nominee elections would have. I'm very glad that municipal politics don't have the partisan political flavours that we have at the provincial and federal levels. It just works better. It's a different type of local politics.

I quite often look at the fishbowl that our city councillors are in. I look at the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, and I think: "Wow. He was in that fishbowl." If you think it's a fishbowl in this House, look at the 12 or 13 members of an elected body who are right there, front and centre, television cameras on them. It's a city of – what? – over a million people, 1.2 million people, and you're under the gun. To couple that with partisan political requirements and party politics I think takes away from the real type of local connection that councillors develop with their electorate. The relationship is different in municipal politics between the council and their electorate. There's no expectation or demand that party politics puts on councillors. They are their own gunslingers. They are able to go ahead and fire off at will. In places like Calgary I know the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* always tried to aim straight, but he definitely shot at will. I wouldn't want to do anything that would influence the freedom of those municipal councillors to act as they saw fit by tainting their process with party politics, as I feel would happen if indeed we had the municipal elections run in conjunction with senatorial nominee elections.

I also have some pretty serious misgivings, Mr. Chair, about some of the money parts of this election act. Half a million bucks on a campaign: that's a huge amount of money. I'm unclear as to what happens with that kind of money after the campaign is finished. Now, if some of that money remains unspent, does it go into the political coffers of the party that supported the individual, or does it go back to the municipality that the individual comes from? Where indeed would any excess unspent monies go? A hundred thousand dollars can be spent on a nomination, and I'm given to understand that the provincial parties would be able to transfer up to a hundred thousand dollars to a candidate. Now, I'm not sure how many candidates they could transfer that hundred thousand dollars to, but it sure seems like a pretty available conduit to move a lot of money to places where political parties, provincial political parties, might want it to end up. This bill, this legislation, makes it easier to move some pretty big sums of money around to benefit provincial parties that want to play the game of electing a nominee for the Senate. Third-party advertisers can spend up to 30,000 bucks, but is that over and above the already defined limits?

There are a lot of unanswered questions about the numbers, the money parts, of this piece of legislation, and the amendment that we seek to have passed here in the House, Mr. Chair, regarding the running of the election with the municipal elections in tandem, is only one item that I think we need to see clarification on. I can see myself coming forward with a number of different amendments to this legislation because there are a whole lot of red flags that abound whenever you take even a cursory look at Bill 13.

Right now the current amendment deals directly with the fact that one of the events that the Senate nominee election could be held in conjunction with is a municipal election. You may think it's a simple thing to add it onto the ballot, but what you're doing is basically running two horse races on the same track, and the sulkies are colliding with the thoroughbreds. You're running that risk of mixing the two, and I don't think that even former Premier Klein would have done that. I mean, he used to like the sulkies, but I don't know if he would ever have wanted them to run with a thoroughbred on the same track at the same time.

The analogy that I use may be a little bit strained or stretched, but I think you get the concept that I fear would happen when you have a municipal election run in conjunction with a Senate nominee election. They're two different races being run at the same time, and they shouldn't be mixed. They should be separately run, and there may be other ways to do it that are outlined in the legislation. One, of course, is as a stand-alone election. We could also run it with a provincial election. That might make more sense. It would give an opportunity . . .

**8:20 p.m.**

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen to speak.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. What a great opportunity this night to rise and speak on this amendment, that has been brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-*Manning*, I believe, which appears to be an attempt to prevent a Senate election from happening in the province of Alberta, which is, really, just basically against the entire point. I don't know why the opposition would want to prevent a Senate election happening. Maybe it's because they want to continue what they did when they were in government, which was to spend their time trying to support Justin Trudeau and things like the carbon tax, which we know the opposition, when they were in government, spent a considerable amount of time on as their main focus, with the opportunity that they had while they were in power.

As you know, Mr. Chair, they spent most of their efforts inside this place shoring up the former Premier's close friend and ally Justin Trudeau, standing with him repeatedly, sometimes even in here, Mr. Chair. You weren't here yet inside this Chamber, so you didn't see it. It was shocking to watch her and her caucus repeatedly stand in this place and vote with Justin Trudeau, stand and vote against Albertans and instead vote with Justin Trudeau down in Ottawa.

The reality is what we saw happen in the Senate recently with bills C-69 and C-48, with Senators voting against their own province, Mr. Chair, voting against the interest of our province and the people that live here, again standing with their overlord Justin Trudeau and forcing through a piece of legislation that has devastating impacts on our industry and our economy and the people that live here. You know, I know that the NDP often want to have this conversation in the context of the word "corporation." They talk a lot about corporations and how it is somehow evil to be some sort of a job creator. But the reality is what we're talking about when industry is impacted by things that Justin Trudeau has done with his ally the now Leader of the Opposition, with his allies inside the Senate.

That affects real, everyday people. That affects people inside your community and inside my community. That affects people who are struggling to pay their mortgage. It means unemployed people. It means people that are suffering. I know the NDP don't seem to care about unemployment. They oversaw the largest unemployment in the history of this province, all of that without seeming to ever even care about the people that had lost their jobs. I think it was over 200,000 people who lost their jobs under the NDP government, something that, by the way, they still haven't apologized to them for, shockingly.

My point, though, Mr. Chair, is that they seem to think that this is just about what will negatively impact corporations. The reality is that this impacts everyday people. Bringing an amendment into this House that would stop us from being able to have an election to elect Senators, that could then be appointed to represent our interests . . .

**Mr. McIver:** Shame.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** . . . it's a shame. It's shameful. Absolutely. I appreciate the hon. deputy House leader for pointing that out. It is absolutely shameful.

Now, nothing surprises me anymore when it comes to the NDP. The reality that I have seen inside this Chamber is that time and time again they stand with their ideology and against Albertans. They almost never stand and defend the people of this province. Instead, they stand and defend people like Justin Trudeau.

Now, I saw the former Premier, the first leader of a political party and the first Premier of this province to ever oversee a one-term government – so we know she lost credibility with Albertans and has clearly lost touch with Albertans.

**Mr. McIver:** One and done.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** One and done, if you will, Mr. Chair.

I saw her speak a lot in this Chamber on this bill, about the fact that this was a waste of time and a waste of money and that it would have no impact. But here's the reality. There have been Senator elections in this province. We saw the fight happen over bills C-69 and C-48. The Senators that fought for us fearlessly, that defended this province, that stood with Albertans were elected Senators that were appointed by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. They were people that were given a mandate by the people of this province to represent them in the Senate. They went and they

represented them inside the Senate. I appreciate that. I think all of us inside this House or at least on the government side of this House appreciate the fact that they would fight for the people of Alberta. Now, who did not fight for Albertans? Which Senators chose to side with Justin Trudeau and side against the people of Alberta, to side against our best interest, to make it so that people would continue to struggle to pay their mortgages, to disrespect this province, to continue to allow the Prime Minister of this country, his majority in the House of Commons and his majority in the Senate, to cause significant devastation to this province and devastate our largest industry? Which Senators chose to support him, Mr. Chair? It was the unelected Senators.

This opposition party, who's coming to this Chamber trying to stop Senator elections from being able to happen, are proposing to the people of Alberta that we continue to just go with the status quo of unelected Senators who will not stand up for our citizens, who will not stand up for the very people that they are supposed to represent inside the Senate, instead of the alternative, which is to elect Senators and, hopefully, have them appointed to be able to go with a mandate to represent this province.

Now, I think, Mr. Chair, this continues to show how out of touch the opposition, the NDP opposition, inside this province is with what Ralph Klein called severely normal Albertans. They do not understand what has taken place and the fact that they have been utterly rejected by the people of this province. Again, the only one-term government in the history of this province, a Premier who served one term and then ultimately got wiped out in an election that saw the largest mandate ever handed to her opponent, ever, and still can't come here and show any humility at all and show any sign of understanding that the people of Alberta have rejected the NDP's policies, have rejected the NDP's ideological arguments because of things exactly like this, that they spend their time inside this Chamber filibustering legislation that would allow Albertans to elect Senators that could go to the Senate to, hopefully, represent them and stand up for us. That's what they're spending their time doing, clearly not understanding the fact that when Albertans fired this Leader of the Opposition as Premier and her cabinet and her caucus on April 16, they fired her for a reason, because they were not listening to the people of Alberta.

Overwhelmingly most Albertans that I talk to want us to go back to some sort of Senator election. Ideally there are many people in Alberta that would like to see, certainly, even bigger reforms to the Senate. There are some complications constitutionally in the process why that is problematic to accomplish – others have tried – certainly problematic for a provincial Legislature to be able to address, but what we can do is that we can put in a process to be able to elect Senators as we have in the past and, ultimately, hopefully, get some Senators inside the Senate that will defend the province of Alberta.

The opposition needs to ask themselves where their priorities are, where they spend their time.

**Mr. McIver:** Who are they working for?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Like, who are they working for? It's a fair question. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader asked: who are they working for? Who right now is this opposition party working for inside this Legislature at 8:30 at night, filibustering a bill, trying to prevent Albertans the opportunity of electing Senators that could then go on to represent them in the Senate? Who are they working for?

Now, in my time inside this Chamber with the Leader of the Opposition and her colleagues that were with her while she was in government, I very rarely saw her work for the people of Alberta. I

most of the time saw her work against the people of Alberta. Her track record and her record in this Chamber are, in my opinion, quite appalling when it comes to the actions that they took that caused Albertans significant consequences, spending their time, of course, starting inside this Chamber with the job-killing carbon tax, which, Mr. Chair, I'm excited to report is gone. Thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the now hon. Premier of this province, who made a promise and kept it, campaigned hard and was able to dispose of the carbon tax.

But the reality is that when that member sat in this chair right here, she spent most of her time trying to bring in the largest tax increase in the history of this province on the people of Alberta. When they protested and said, "This isn't right; you never campaigned on this; you hid this from us when you were going through the campaign; this is having consequences on us because it's a tax on everything; you're increasing our taxes during a recession," when they brought that forward inside this Chamber, you know what she said, Mr. Chair? I know you weren't here, so you may not have known. She called them Chicken Little. She told them to take the bus. Her office told seniors – I bring this up all the time because it's so absolutely appalling – inside my community to go hold a fundraiser to pay for her carbon tax.

Fast-forward to April 16. What happened? They got fired despite the fact that when we were sitting on that side of the House, we would warn them over and over. My friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays would stand inside this Chamber and say: you're getting this one wrong; if you keep doing this, you're going to lose your job; you're not going to be in government if you keep going in this direction. They continued to go down this direction.

8:30 p.m.

Well, Mr. Chair, I'll do it on this side of the House, through you to the Official Opposition: if you keep behaving this way, spending your time protesting and filibustering against the will of Albertans, you're not going to have the job of Official Opposition much longer. You will go back to being the third party or maybe not have any members inside this Chamber because you're disconnected from the people of Alberta. You're not hearing what they want. There is not one person in this province that I've ever talked to that said that they wanted their Official Opposition to come here and bring an amendment like this to this Chamber that tries to stop senatorial elections. There's not one person that I heard say that.

Now, granted, there are different ideological beliefs inside this province. There are different political beliefs. That's why we have more than one political party in this Chamber. That's why we're supposed to have a civil debate, and it's okay for the opposition to do that. In fact, Mr. Chair, that's their job. But they know – they know – that they're standing up against senatorial elections purely based on their ideology, not on any of their constituents'. They know that.

They're here supporting their friend Justin Trudeau, who does not want to see any more elected Senators like Senator Black and Senator Tannas in the Senate, because they don't want to see it any more. They're just still doing the bidding of their boss Justin Trudeau in Ottawa. They've done it the entire time that they've been in this Chamber. Justin Trudeau's greatest ally in this country – I want you to think about that, Mr. Chair – his greatest ally in this country was the former Premier of Alberta. The former Premier, let's be clear. His greatest ally is not the current Premier of Alberta. The former Premier of Alberta was Justin Trudeau's greatest ally and still is. Think about that. A Prime Minister who is overseeing direct attacks on our province and our largest industry, a Prime Minister who has forced through bill after bill that hurts the very

people that we were sent here to represent, and his biggest ally is the then Premier of Alberta, now the Leader of the Opposition.

Do you know how long it took for the now Leader of the Opposition, then Premier, to even go and talk about Bill C-69 despite the fact that this party, when it was in opposition, continued to raise it in question period, continued to bring it up each and every day inside this Chamber before they would even take the time to say the words "Bill C-69" and get on an airplane finally and go down there to see Justin Trudeau and talk about it? Two hundred and some days. [interjections] They're heckling me because they don't want to hear about it. They don't want to hear about what they did. They don't want to hear about the fact that they hid for 200 and some days trying to back up their friend Justin Trudeau instead of getting on an airplane and going down there.

In fact, the now deputy leader of the NDP, who was Deputy Premier at the time, attacked me in question period because I had the nerve, she said, to suggest that somebody in the government get on an airplane and fly down to Ottawa and defend us on Bill C-69. She got up and made fun of me, that we want to spend all of our time in Ottawa. I don't want to spend all my time in Ottawa, Mr. Chair. I'm quite happy to be here in Alberta, but what I do want is my government to stand up against Ottawa and stand up against Justin Trudeau when they come and attack Albertans' interests. That's what I want. I certainly don't want the Official Opposition of Alberta to sit inside this Chamber and filibuster Albertans' opportunity to be able to elect Senators.

Now, this used to be in place here. Some of my hon. colleagues may not be aware that this was a process, one that we have used successfully in the past, that expired, I believe – I don't know if my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays remembers.

**Mr. McIver:** A couple of years ago.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Oh, two years ago. It stopped at that time. The then government of the day, the NDP, let it lapse despite protests from the opposition.

You know, here is the reality. I hope that my good friend Andrew Scheer will be the Prime Minister of this great country at the end of October. I intend to do my best to be able to campaign so that he will do that. I can tell you what, Mr. Chair. If this province sets up a system to elect Senators, Andrew Scheer will respect the mandate that Albertans give him, and he will put him in the Senate, just like Stephen Harper did. Then we'll have more elected Senators inside the Chamber standing up for Alberta. Then if, God forbid, for some reason the NDP are ever able to regain this side of the House – I can't see it happening if this is their approach to legislating – at least then there would be more elected Senators inside that Chamber in Ottawa able to stand up for this province.

Tonight as we labour away in the Legislature, we have Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition spending their time filibustering a piece of legislation that Albertans want, that would allow them to elect their Senators. Mr. Chair, I don't know how your constituents feel about that. I do know how my constituents feel about that. They're not happy. Now, the opposition giggles because they know that in my constituency there are not a lot of people that are happy with the NDP, period.

**An Hon. Member:** What about Twitter?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, if Twitter was in charge, Mr. Chair, Greg Clark would be Premier. We're okay with that.

The opposition continues to show that they have absolutely no idea what severely normal Albertans think. They have lost. I would submit to you that they have what Ralph Klein called dome disease, and they've had it from the moment that they were elected in 2015

to sit on this side of the House. They still have it. I thought that they would finally show a little bit of humility, take a step back and say: "How did we end up being the only one-term government in the history of the province? How did we end up losing an election so badly that we handed our opponents the largest mandate in the history of the province?"

**Mr. McIver:** Without making any mistakes on the way, too.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah.

How? How? Have they done that, Mr. Chair? No. They spend their time trying to come up with new and better ways to filibuster the very thing that Albertans voted for.

Put aside the fact that the consequences to our province, based on the fact that the Senate voted the way that they did and the NDP stopping us from having more elected representation in there – they seem to have an ideological belief that there should not be elected Senators. That's their prerogative, I guess. But what they're really putting aside is the election promise that we made Albertans to do this. This is not something that needs to be consulted on anymore. This has been consulted on. It's called an election. On April 16 Albertans gave us an historical mandate to come and get this type of things passed. Mr. Chair, we've said it in here many times: this side of the House is going to keep our promises.

Mr. Chair, I don't know if in your time as a new MLA in this Chamber you got to experience the same thing, but my very favourite thing about being an MLA is actually when you get to go home on the weekend and talk to your constituents, go to the coffee shops, show up at the rodeos, go to the grocery store – for us rural guys grocery stores can be quite a journey that lasts several hours – and see the people that sent you here to represent them in this Chamber and see what they think. What I can tell you is that they continue to say the same thing over and over: "Good job. Go back there. Do what we sent you there to do. Tell the Premier he's doing a good job. We stand with him a hundred per cent. And tell the opposition to stop playing games and to start doing things for Albertans."

If you can't stand up in this Chamber and be united with the government against an Ottawa that just brought in and passed bills C-69 and C-48, when could you stand up in this Chamber with Albertans? Of all the things to fight against, they choose this. Of all the things. Think about that, Mr. Chair. Of all the things that they could choose inside this Chamber, there are lots of opportunities. There's been a lot of debate on legislation inside this place. There are other bills we could even be talking about today, but they choose to filibuster Senate elections. They can't give Albertans just that?

**Mr. McIver:** It should be a gimme.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** This is a gimme. Absolutely.

I'm actually shocked by it, Mr. Chair. Now, I guess at this point I shouldn't be shocked anymore when it comes to this Official Opposition. We know that they were the party of fear and smear. You've seen it the entire time that we've seen the NDP. At least under the leadership of this current leader, their focus is on fear and smear, attacking people personally, going with the politics of the negative. They have nothing positive that they can defend on their own record. That's why they always ended up there, brutally – brutally – focusing on that over and over and over. That's why Albertans fired them; because they're not interested in that. They instead chose the hon. Premier, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed's positive vision for this province. They made that decision on April 16. They said: "Take the fear and smear and put them on the other side of the House. Put that guy in charge, and we'll go with the positive vision." That's what they focused on.

But what is new since we've been here, Mr. Chair, this time around in the 30th Legislature is that they've moved from fear and smear to anger. Anger. You see it in question period: anger. It's just anger. It's what it is. My favourite thing is sometimes when they're doing it, they even look over real quick to see if we're all looking at them to see if we can watch them be angry, like my kids do when they're trying to get attention. Anger. Angry at whom? Well, I think they're angry at Albertans. They're angry at Albertans for firing them. They're angry that they got sent to the time-out box over there for their behaviour. They're mad about it.

But that's the wrong approach, Mr. Chair, and that's how you end up in a spot where you're voting against Albertans, where you're filibustering against Albertans on something like senatorial elections. It's because you're focused on the anger. You're not focused on: hey, what did I do wrong to end up on that side of the House? What did the Leader of the Official Opposition do wrong that she's not the Premier anymore?

*8:40 p.m.*

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, on A2 I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall rising to speak.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that we were talking about the amendment to a bill. I heard the Government House Leader speak about that we are blocking this election. This amendment is not blocking any election. I wish that he had read this amendment so that he would know what this amendment is actually doing to this piece of legislation, the Alberta Senate Election Act.

I guess on this side of the House I will agree to this much, that what this piece of legislation is trying to do is bring in some kind of process where the Senate can be elected and not selected. We, at the same time, do know that the Senate plays an important role in scrutinizing legislation, suggesting improvements, and they can even originate pieces of legislation in their Chamber. Those are decisions that impact Albertans, impact Canadians. I would certainly agree with the other side that there needs to be some process, that there needs to be some accountability. At the same time, we do know that in order to reform the Senate in a meaningful way, a constitutional change is required, and nothing short of that will cut it.

We have seen this kind of legislation before, and in fact under that piece of legislation on April 23, 2012, along with the provincial election, senatorial elections were also held. Out of 13 candidates the top three were Doug Black, Scott Tannas, and Mike Shaikh. Mike Shaikh: I will talk a little bit more about him. Two of these three people, Doug Black and Scott Tannas, were appointed by then Prime Minister Harper back in 2013. Mike Shaikh is still waiting, I guess, for that appointment. He got almost 309,000 votes. He is a fairly established person. He is involved in the community at large in Calgary with the Alberta children's hospital, with the Paralympic Foundation, with the Calgary Police Commission, and the list goes on and on.

At that time, in 2013, is when they appointed the two. After that if they'd wanted to appoint Mike Shaikh, they could have done so back then. While I was at a community event where the Premier was present and Mike Shaikh was present as well, at that time I heard about this piece of legislation, that they're bringing in this legislation so that people like Mike can get elected.

But we do know, at the end of the day, that it's a constitutional body, and the appointment to that body is governed by the Constitution. It's the prerogative of the Prime Minister to appoint whoever they want. Certainly, if the process were to be followed, Mike Shaikh would have been a Senator, but what we see here is that he is still not a Senator. In fact, this Premier, when he was in

Ottawa, had that opportunity to appoint Mike Shaikh to the Senate, and they didn't do that.

Again, this government was elected on a promise of jobs, the economy, and pipelines, and we are seeing here that they are doing the kinds of things that don't create jobs, don't help the economy. Instead, these are some kinds of political stances that may help the Premier down the road should he choose to take a run at the Prime Ministership. Other than that, I don't think that that was the platform, the mandate that this government was given.

What essentially this amendment is doing is keeping these elections separate from elections under the local authorities act, municipal elections, because we know that municipal elections are not party based, and now they're politicizing this process in a way that political parties, federal and provincial, should be able to nominate Senate candidates and bring politics into the municipal election. That's all this amendment is doing, asking this government to consider separating Senate elections from the Municipal Government Act, and it was not what the House leader from the government was suggesting.

There are many other things in this piece of legislation that are troublesome. Certainly, holding an election will incur expenses, and we are incurring public expenses through public dollars on a process that we know didn't work in the past. We also know that it's not likely to work in the future because these elections will in no way, shape, or manner bind the Prime Minister, whoever is in that position, in that office. They are not binding on the Prime Minister, so it's an exercise which will waste taxpayer money.

In fact, this time we are going one step further. We are also creating regulation-making powers under this piece of legislation, where, among other things, government, through order in council, will be able to set the remuneration and expenses that need to be paid to Senate nominees which, at the end of the day, may not end up in the Senate.

This is a piece of legislation that's not needed at all because we know that appointment to the Senate is a constitutional process, and this election will have no binding effect on those appointments. These elections didn't result in orderly appointments before for the Senators-elect in the 2012 elections, and they're not likely to be followed going forward, but they may give this government an opportunity, I guess, to rally the troops around their nominees, collect data, get contacts for their fundraising, and create opportunities for them to channel in the money that we were trying to prevent from affecting the outcomes of elections.

As government our first piece of legislation was to ban corporate and union donations, ban big money from politics. This is indirectly, I guess, bringing that money back into politics, where even political parties will be able to spend \$300,000 more on the Senate election and not only affect the outcome of elections through money, but they will also impact the municipal election, which will be happening at the same time.

This amendment: all it's doing is asking to separate these two elections. When it comes to the main bill, we can still talk to the merits of the bill, whether this election is at all needed, whether this process is at all legitimate or there are some other motives behind bringing forward this piece of legislation, whether it's just to please some people, that they will have a chance to run for the Senate and this government will have a chance to collect data, collect donors' information, and all those things. To conclude, I will say that this is a common-sense amendment, and this amendment will make sure that the elections under the Local Authorities Election Act are separate from this election, which doesn't have any kind of legitimacy in that it's not binding on the Prime Minister. It will not result in Senate appointments.

8:50 p.m.

If this Premier wanted to amend the way Senate appointments are made, they had that opportunity when they were in the federal government. They were there for 10 years, but they knew very well that that would require a constitutional change in order to meaningfully reform the Senate. They didn't dare touch the Constitution because opening the Constitution is difficult and its process of amendment is quite difficult. You need 50 per cent of the population with 50 per cent of the provinces agreeing to the amendment.

Again, this piece of legislation is a waste of taxpayers' money. It's not the process that has any kind of guarantee that it will be followed. It was not followed in the past and, in fact, not followed when, as I mentioned, Mike Shaikh was number three in that election in 2013. The other two Senators were appointed in 2013, and Mike Shaikh kept waiting for his appointment until now.

I think I will urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment, that will result in separating Senate elections from the municipal elections. It's a common-sense amendment. I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of it.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** I see the hon. Member from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to clarify a couple of points, interestingly, that the Government House Leader made. First of all, it's clear he hasn't actually read the amendment because what the amendment does is not cancel or kill this bill, although I'm going to have a really hard time voting in favour of this bill. The amendment removes the ability to hold senatorial elections during municipal elections. The concern that we've been raising for the last little while is that having a senatorial election in the way the bill is written, being backed and funded by provincial parties, takes the nonpartisan element out of municipal elections and confuses them.

The other thing that's interesting is that, you know, the members opposite talk about how Stephen Harper appointed those that won their election races. However, he didn't do that across the country. He did it in a couple of instances. I think the issue that many of us on this side of the House have is that we are creating a piece of legislation that actually does nothing. It has no teeth. There are no consequences. We can't make the federal government adhere to whatever legislation regarding senatorial elections or races here in the province of Alberta.

The other thing is that what this bill is wanting to do actually costs taxpayers more money. I find it interesting that for a party and a government that talks about trying to save tax dollars, this bill does the exact opposite of that, again, putting up a front as far as an elected Senator who isn't actually elected; they're appointed.

Now, maybe part of the hope is that somehow this will get the attention of Ottawa, and they will make changes to the Senate. It's interesting that the Premier, who used to be a cabinet minister under the Harper government, had an opportunity to completely restructure the Senate. Well, he spent 10 years in Ottawa yet chose not to. At that time there were no problems with the Prime Minister appointing Senators because it would appear that it worked in their favour. Now, with a federal Liberal government, they're not getting their appointees or electeds appointed.

But, I mean, the amendment here is not to kill this bill. The amendment here is because of concerns that we have with this senatorial election taking place at the same time as the municipal elections and, especially, allowing provincial parties to contribute a significant amount of money. In fact, \$100,000 per candidate is a significant amount. Keep in mind, Mr. Chair, that just a few short

years ago we passed a bill in this House that restricted the amount that provincial candidates could spend during the election campaign to \$50,000. So the fact that political parties can spend \$100,000 – and that's just per political party per candidate. Again, as I mentioned earlier, you know, if there was a party that endorsed a number of candidates, well, they're doling out hundreds of thousands of dollars to the different candidates.

I just really wanted to clarify – I know that the Government House Leader loves to jump up and accuse us of attacking and fear and smear yet spends 20 minutes doing so as opposed to talking to the amendment to fix this bill. Again, the challenge that I have is that we are bringing forward legislation that has no impact whatsoever because this is federal jurisdiction.

Oh, the other point I just wanted to make is that at 8:30 p.m. this is not a filibuster. Welcome to work. This sounds very familiar to when the opposition voted against morning sittings because they didn't want to start at 9 a.m. I remember how much Albertans found that interesting. Now, we have filibustered. Of course, we have. It's a tool that the opposition can use. The Wildrose opposition used it. In fact, it's been used ever since we've had Legislatures. But, Mr. Chair, I want to clarify that at 8:30 p.m. this is the first time – well, it was. This is now the second time I'm speaking to this amendment. That was the first time I was speaking to the amendment. That's not a filibuster. Again, happy to show the Government House Leader what a filibuster looks like, maybe not in this moment, but at some point. But I just wanted to clarify that this is not a filibuster.

This amendment does not kill this bill; this amendment tries to amend it. The Government House Leader knows that, sat in opposition for the last four years, knows full well that the role of the opposition is to hold the government to account and to propose amendments to try to strengthen bills, which is exactly what we're doing, and, in that vein, also to talk about what the amendment would do in an attempt to sway members to use their good judgment to say: "You know what? This is a reasonable amendment, and we can support it because it will enhance this bill."

With that, because I'm not filibustering, I'll take my seat.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, do I see anybody else looking to speak to A2? I see the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I, too, will rise relatively briefly just to speak to this particular amendment. I think it's worth while, as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview did already point out, to point out again that when the hon. House leader begins his commentary by suggesting that somehow the members on this side of the House are not doing their jobs as opposition members because we are introducing an amendment designed to kill their bill, he does himself quite a disservice, having very obviously not read the amendment. I can understand that there might be some members of the government caucus who are here just because they've been told to be here in case there's a vote, but as the House leader it would seem to me that it would be part of his job to read the amendments that we are introducing and certainly to read the amendments about which he is then going to engage in a rather passionate and loud series of accusations and statements.

I will say that listening to the hon. House leader lecture us about (a) being too angry or (b) not having enough humility is a little bit like – I don't know – listening to someone like Mike Duffy lecture Canadians on representational politics and best practices in filing expense claims. You know, there are some people who are credible on the issue, and there are others who are not. I would suggest that on the matters of showing an absence of anger or an abundance of humility, probably the Government House Leader is not the government's best foot forward on those two issues.

**9:00 p.m.**

Beyond that, you know, there is no question, as I stated the other night, that this is a bill that is a bit of a waste of time for all the reasons that many people on this side have outlined. The Prime Minister, whether it be the current Prime Minister or a future Prime Minister or even potentially the current Premier – heaven knows that many people suggest that that's a glint in his eye – may or may not choose to appoint Senators who have been elected. In fact, as has been pointed out, previous Conservative Prime Ministers did not appoint every elected Senator as a matter of course. They picked and chose. Even where there were elections, even those people who ran on the old-style Reform ideas of a triple-E Senate back in the day, when they had the chance, didn't act with the courage of their convictions. They acted with the courage of their convenience. They picked a few of the elected Senators that they wanted to appoint, and they ignored others. It is, actually, historically – well, let's just call it rich, for lack of a more descriptive term.

Nonetheless, you know, just on the overall issue of the Senate, I've yet to actually hear from members opposite, since they are so bent on moving forward and giving the Senate more credibility by, hopefully, having a few people who have had some passing democratic relationship with the people whom they would be seeking to represent. When they do that work of building up the Senate, the members opposite have yet to answer the question: do they think this notion of being elected for life is a thing to which we want to give authority, agency, credibility, power? I don't know.

It is true. I wouldn't call the NDP's long-standing opposition to the Senate an ideological thing. I would call it a democratic thing. I would call it the outcome of a group of people who have come together, whether right or left. It's not really a right, left issue. We just came together and looked at how the Senate functions and said that under the current rules there is no way to fix the democratic deficit which surrounds the Senate. This little sort of nibbling on the edges that this piece of legislation is attempting to do is not enough to fix the fundamental democratic deficit.

And contrary to what the hon. House leader suggested, that somehow that was an ideological position, I don't think it is an ideological position, at least from the context of things that are on the right or the left. It is simply a position that grows from a profound respect for democracy. The fact of giving more credibility to an institution which is built on people who are, for the most part, appointed or, conversely, appointed where elected at the discretion of the Prime Minister, as happened with the Conservatives when they were in power, and appointed for life – even if they get into the Senate as a result of the election, it is then for life. Are these things that folks over there in the UCP actually think are good democratic principles to enhance and to grow? I don't know. It seems kind of simplistic to me.

I would also suggest that there's another problem that, again, members opposite haven't really answered or discussed really clearly with Albertans, and that is the fact that the Senate is itself so nonrepresentational. We know that roughly – one second; let me just look at this – just under 10 per cent of Canadians live in the province of Nova Scotia. Sorry. I got that wrong. Just over 2 and a half per cent of Canadians live in the province of Nova Scotia, yet they have almost 10 per cent of the Senators. The same is true for the people of New Brunswick. Two per cent live in New Brunswick, and they, too, have almost 10 per cent of the Senators. Half a per cent of Canadians live in Prince Edward Island, and they have 4 per cent of the Senators. Then over here in Alberta almost 12 per cent of Canadians live in Alberta, yet we only have less than 6 per cent of the Senators. And that disproportionality extends to Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and B.C. What this is is an undemocratic

institution which crystallizes a lack of representation by population for people in the west, so why do we want to grow that?

Now, this is just an interesting conversation. I understand that members opposite put this in their platform, that they promised that they would do this. I think it was probably not a particularly salient part of what made people vote for the UCP. I don't think that it was a fully canvassed conversation with Albertans. Nonetheless, it was in the platform, so by all means go ahead and do it. We're certainly not here to filibuster this issue because, of course, it was in your platform, and, you know, have at 'er, go ahead, and do the thing. It's costly. It's going to cost us in terms of the money put into an election, and it will not bring about the outcome that you are pursuing, but you put it in your platform, so I guess that's good enough.

But like the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview indicated, talking about this in Committee of the Whole for the second time at 5 after 9, when we just resumed at 7:30, is not a filibuster, for heaven's sake. I mean, it's, I would say, a little delicate of the folks over there on the other side to start referring to hour 3 of the debate on this as a filibuster. Trust me; it's not a filibuster.

Just on the matter of filibustering and the matter of acknowledging the democratic will of the people of Alberta, there are some things that we think, certain criteria that we would consider in terms of what is or isn't appropriate for a filibuster. I would say that if the matter that was under debate was something that was in direct contradiction to what the members opposite told Albertans in the last election, well, what I would say, as a result of being so respectful to the people of Alberta and the will expressed in the last election, is that we have a very positive obligation to be here for a long time.

For instance, when the Premier said to Albertans, "We will not legislate on what we perceive to be divisive social issues" and then turns around and immediately legislates on divisive social issues, well, we have an obligation to filibuster because someone has got to hold the Premier to account, because Albertans voted for a promise that was then broken.

It is the same as when the Premier said to members of the media during the election campaign, "We will not do anything to undermine the entitlement of Albertans to overtime," and then they turn around and bring in legislation that absolutely cuts overtime by a third. Well, I listen to electors, and if electors voted for their platform, which they did, and the platform said one thing and then these guys turn around and do something absolutely different, well, it seems to me that it's actually my obligation to filibuster as much or as long as we can because certainly that was the will of Albertans, because we can only go on what it was that the Premier said to them during the election. In some cases what we've seen since the election is a direct contradiction of what the Premier said during the election, so we therefore have that obligation in front of us.

Nonetheless, I will say, going back to the first point, that the House leader ought to have read the amendment, because this conversation that we're having right now on this amendment is not about whether this bill should go ahead or not go ahead. As I said before, members put it in their platform. I think it's a bit ill advised. We're going to point out why we think it's ill advised, but if the members opposite want to go ahead with it, have at 'er.

The challenge that we have with this is that what the members opposite did not do and what the Premier did not do when he talked about this in the platform is that he did not say: we're going to write this in a way to create a whole bunch of loopholes in order to allow more money into politics. That's actually what this amendment is geared towards. This amendment is trying to avoid having more big money come into politics, increasing spending limits, and allowing

political parties to play around in areas that previously were not particularly partisan. That's a new thing, and that's not something that was actually in the platform of the UCP, so it is incumbent upon us to question that and to poke at it. What this amendment is about is ensuring that we don't have ourselves in a situation with the municipal election – we have previously had a practice in Alberta of not having provincial political parties engage in the campaigns of municipal politicians – where we start running slates or have municipal politicians with specific alignments to political parties and then use the senatorial campaign as a mechanism of getting more money into that campaign.

9:10 p.m.

That's what this is really about. It's about ensuring that the fundamental principles around getting big money out of politics, putting caps on how much money you can spend, making sure that votes win elections, not dollars, that those principles and those overall principles of democracy are protected and preserved.

By all means, carry on. Elect your Senators. Do your thing. It is not going to get you what you need. It's going to waste a bit of money. It's going to be a fruitless exercise, but – whatever – if you love it so much, go ahead. But don't use that as a means to then undermine the election financing laws that we put in place, that were hugely popular with Albertans, that members of this House, including the predecessor parties of the UCP, voted in favour of when we brought them through. You, too, are accountable to voters for that because voters believed that you agreed with the idea of keeping spending under control and getting big money out of politics. That's what you voted for when we brought this legislation in in the last term, and that's what the Wildrose ran on in 2015. That's certainly what we ran on in 2015, and that's what we delivered, and voters thought that that's what they'd gotten. The key, then, is to not use this piece of legislation as a Trojan Horse to somehow undermine the consensus that clearly existed in Alberta to get a lot of money out of politics and to ensure that votes win elections, not dollars.

I know the members opposite love to talk about, you know, the biggest democratic mandate ever, blah, blah, blah. As with everything, there are different sorts of variations of the facts that members opposite tend to go on. You know, there's sort of the – anyway, I won't get into all the descriptions right now, but one is sort of a half-correct fact, shall we call it. This is where, yes, the biggest number of voters voted for this government, because, of course, the population has grown. Obviously, they are nowhere near close to having the largest percentage of the vote of Albertans, not now and not even close. It's not like you're running second; it's not like you're running third. That percentage of the vote was surpassed by a number of other political leaders in this province's history. But, by all means, you know, wrap yourself in the cloak of population growth and pat yourself on the back and then accuse us of having no humility. Carry on and see where that gets you. Nonetheless, I digress.

The key here is that what we are urging people here and members opposite to do is to carry on. By all means, go ahead with your bill, but don't use your bill to undermine the principle of democracy driven by votes as opposed to democracy driven by dollars. Everybody here agreed that that was not a good thing a few short years ago. Albertans did not vote to have lots of big money come back into politics. That was not in your platform, so don't do it.

Our amendment is about ensuring that that is not what happens. So we would urge members opposite to support this amendment and understand that, contrary to what the House leader suggested in a very ill-informed way, this amendment is not about killing the bill. It is simply about making sure that the bill is focused on its

stated objective and does not allow other unstated objectives to be achieved as it currently is written in the bill. We certainly hope to see people support this amendment on that basis.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

Hon members, are there any members wishing to speak to A2?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:15 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

|        |        |        |
|--------|--------|--------|
| Bilous | Dach   | Notley |
| Ceci   | Ganley |        |

Against the motion:

|                    |               |            |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Allard             | Jones         | Reid       |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | LaGrange      | Shandro    |
| Copping            | Loewen        | Smith      |
| Ellis              | Long          | Toews      |
| Fir                | McIver        | Toor       |
| Getson             | Nally         | Turton     |
| Glubish            | Nicolaides    | van Dijken |
| Goodridge          | Nixon, Jason  | Williams   |
| Gotfried           | Nixon, Jeremy | Yao        |
| Guthrie            | Pon           | Yaseen     |

Issik

|         |         |              |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 5 | Against – 31 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

**The Deputy Chair:** Moving to the bill, I see the hon. Minister of Service Alberta rising to speak.

**Mr. Glubish:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise in this Chamber to speak to Bill 13, the Alberta Senate Election Act. I've listened to many powerful and persuasive speeches from my colleagues in this Chamber over the last few weeks, and I have to say, through you to them, just how proud I am to serve in this Legislature by their side. I am proud of our collective commitment to deliver on our promises.

But, Mr. Chair, sometimes we face obstacles on our path to keeping our promises to Albertans. Some of those obstacles come to us from the federal government. A perfect example of what I mean by this is the federal government's Bill C-69, otherwise known as the No More Pipelines Bill, and Bill C-48, the west coast tanker ban. These bills are bad for Alberta, they stifle our energy industry, they hurt our economy, and they kill Alberta jobs.

Mr. Chair, in this House we don't often find unanimous agreement, but one thing we did agree on was Government Motion 8, which said:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call upon the Senate of Canada to reject Bill C-48, which unjustly discriminates against Alberta and prevents the export of its energy through the north coast of British Columbia, and to reject Bill C-69 as originally drafted, unless it is comprehensively amended to ensure respect for Alberta's exclusive provincial jurisdiction over its non-renewable natural resources and to ensure greater certainty for investors in major resource development projects.

I was proud to vote in favour of this motion, and I was pleased to see that we could all put our partisan differences aside to support

this motion. This motion passed with 80 votes for and not a single vote against.

This unanimous support sent a strong signal to Ottawa that bills C-69 and C-48 were bad for Alberta and that this was not a partisan position; it was an Albertan position. But, Mr. Chair, it didn't matter that Albertans were united on this issue because our Senators were divided on this issue. When the Senate ultimately voted on the fates of bills C-48 and C-69, it was our elected representatives in the Senate who had our backs. It was the elected representatives in the Senate who voted to send a message to the Trudeau Liberals that these bills were unacceptable.

But what about our unelected, appointed representatives? They didn't have our backs. Albertans deserve better, Mr. Chair, and that is why I am pleased to speak in favour of Bill 13, the Alberta Senate Election Act. You see, bills C-69 and C-48 are not the only anti-Alberta pieces of legislation to come out of the Trudeau Liberal government in recent years. Trudeau's government is also pushing for a national carbon tax. Albertans rejected the carbon tax in the last provincial election, and I intend to stand firm and fight this Ottawa-led agenda.

I'd like to tell you a story from my home in the riding of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. During the election campaign I knocked on thousands of doors. I started in November of last year, and I didn't stop until election day, April 16. Furthermore, I hosted several town halls across rural Strathcona county, from Ardrossan to Colchester, from Cooking Lake to Antler Lake. I can tell you that the residents in my riding were most passionate in their desire to repeal the carbon tax. I assured them time and again that a United Conservative government's first action, if elected, would be to pass Bill 1, the carbon tax repeal act. Mr. Chair, I'm happy to say through you to my constituents back home: promise made, promise kept.

But, Mr. Chair, I will tell you that many of my constituents were worried about what comes next. They were worried about Prime Minister Trudeau and his Liberal government's threat to impose a federal carbon tax on Alberta. I'll tell you now what I told them then. I told them that, if elected, I would fight every day along with my colleagues in this Legislature to stand up for Alberta, to defend our interests, and to fight against Trudeau and his agenda to impose a carbon tax on Alberta. I told them that we would not sit idly by and allow another carbon tax to kill Alberta jobs, to chase investment away from Alberta, and to raise the cost of living for all Albertans. My constituents were encouraged by my commitment to stand up for them, but, understandably so, they still held concerns about the federal government. That is why it is so important for us to pass the Alberta Senate Election Act. We need to make Alberta Senators more accountable to Albertans.

If you'll indulge me for a moment, Mr. Chair, I'd like to return to the campaign trail and the carbon tax conversation. I was often asked by my constituents: "What if you fail? What if Trudeau wins?" I'll tell you now what I told them then, that failure is not an option. We cannot afford to lose this fight. We cannot afford to treat the Trudeau government's carbon tax agenda with casual indifference. We cannot afford to cede our constitutional jurisdiction on this very important matter. How much more confidence could we have if all Alberta Senators were elected? As we have seen with bills C-69 and C-48, our elected representatives in the Senate have proven to be more likely to fight for our province's interests.

Back to the campaign trail and the carbon tax conversation, Mr. Chair, I was sometimes asked, "What will it cost to fight this fight?" I'll tell you now what I told them then: "What is the cost to Alberta if we choose to abandon this fight?" We've had a taste of this cost over the last four years under the previous government, when they

brought in their job-killing carbon tax, and it wasn't pretty. We cannot afford to allow a multibillion-dollar carbon tax to be imposed on Albertans, we cannot afford to chase away tens of billions of dollars of investment from our province, and we cannot afford to drive more Albertans into poverty due to rising unemployment and an ever-increasing cost of living. This is why it is so important that we pass the Alberta Senate Election Act to ensure that future Senate representatives will have our backs and stand up for Alberta.

One last time, Mr. Chair, I'll return to the campaign trail and the carbon tax conversation. Sometimes I was asked: "What about the environment? What is your plan for the environment if you repeal the carbon tax?" I'll tell you now what I told them then: "The world needs more Alberta energy, not less." I'll say it again because I'm not ashamed of the Alberta record of excellence when it comes to responsible natural resource development: "The world needs more Alberta energy, not less."

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

As we see the global demand for energy increase, it would be irresponsible for Alberta to voluntarily give up market share to other oil-producing countries, yet thanks to the mismanagement of the previous NDP government and the current federal government, this is exactly what is happening. If we don't produce it, someone else will. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Russia will meet the global demand, and they will do so with a failing grade on environmental standards, they will do so with a failing grade on human rights protections, and they will do so with a failing grade on safety.

So I'll say it again, Madam Chair: the world needs more Alberta energy, not less. Developing our resources is the responsible thing to do. We have proven that we can balance our vital economic interests with the need to be responsible global citizens and good stewards of the environment. This is why I will never tire of standing up for the world-class Alberta energy industry, for if our energy producers meet the rising global demand, we will displace the volume supplied by other high-polluting energy nations. Indeed, the global environment will be better off. Not only that, but all Albertans will be better off because of the wealth generated by the responsible development of our resources. This wealth will create jobs. It will facilitate investment into our economy, including investment in new technologies and innovation.

9:40 p.m.

As you know, Madam Chair, given my past career as a venture capital investor I'm very passionate about technology and innovation. The wealth generated by a thriving energy industry would support ongoing investment into new technologies and innovation in our industry. This would position us well to harness technology and innovation, to protect our position as global leaders and responsible developers of our natural resources. This, again, is why we need to pass the Alberta Senate Election Act, to ensure that our Senators will have our back.

Madam Chair, to recap quickly, I've shared with you four things that I shared with my constituents during the election campaign regarding the threat of a federal carbon tax and, on a broader scale, the threat of a federal government imposing policies that are bad for Alberta. One, I told them: if elected, I will fight against a carbon tax and stand up for Alberta's interests. Two, I told them: failure is not an option. Three, the cost of abandoning this fight is far greater than the cost of seeing it through. Fourth and finally, the world needs more Alberta energy, not less. I want to take this opportunity to assure my constituents that I am as committed as ever to standing up for them. One tangible way that I can demonstrate my

commitment is by speaking in favour of and voting for Bill 13, the Alberta Senate Election Act.

To wrap up, I'd like to tell you about a phone call I had recently with a friend and constituent from Strathcona-Sherwood Park. While I was on my way to the Legislature to prepare for the debate and the vote on Government Motion 21, my friend asked me what we would be working on that day, so I filled him in on the motion. I told him about how it supports our government's efforts to challenge the federal government's attempt to impose a carbon tax on Alberta. I told him about how it acknowledges that the federal government's carbon tax would violate our provincial jurisdiction and that we would launch a constitutional challenge, if necessary. I told him about how it recognizes the negative impacts that a carbon tax has on our way of life, and I told him about how it recognizes that Alberta's oil and gas industries continue to be global leaders in emissions reductions. You know what he said to me, Madam Chair? He said: thank you; thank you for standing up for us.

Madam Chair, through you, I want to send a message to my friend and to all of my constituents: I've got your back, this government has got your back, and if we pass Bill 13, the Alberta Senate Election Act, we will be one significant step closer to ensuring that our Senators will have your back as well. That is why I am proud to support this bill.

**The Chair:** Other members on Bill 13? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a great pleasure of mine to be able to stand up and speak to Bill 13, the Alberta Senate Election Act. There are times when we have to remind ourselves about the truly awesome responsibility that we have in this Chamber. I am one of 87 people in this entire province that has the capacity to stand up and to speak on behalf of my constituents to legislation. We should never forget how important this exercise that we call democracy is.

I think that sometimes we need to stop and take pieces of legislation and remind ourselves of the historical context which we are addressing in this bill today. I would draw to your attention that we are talking about a Senate elections act, that from 1864 through 1867 a group of gentlemen in various colonies of the British North American colonies had the opportunity to meet in places like Charlottetown and Quebec City to debate the union of the British North American colonies. In that debate they had to discuss: "What is the best form of government that we could have? How would we organize this democracy for this country, this idea, this thing called Canada and what it would become?"

Macdonald, Cartier, Brown: Fathers of Confederation. The Fathers of Confederation, Madam Chair, that brought the wisdom of this young country together to decide: how would we best organize ourselves? They chose a federation. They chose a federal system of government, one that would have a national government, one that would have provincial governments, a government that would be a bicameral Legislature within our national federal system of government. Why? We understood even from our very inception that it was critical that in a House of Commons that would be dominated by Ontario and Quebec, a Senate would be there to represent those parts of the country that were less populous, that could not defend themselves against an Ontario and a Quebec that could dominate the House of Commons.

Now, I've heard many of the opposition over the last day talk about the problems with the Senate, and there are problems with the Senate. I've heard them talk about the problems that they're bringing up in relation to this bill: "It's going to cost too much. There's no more accountability once they've been elected. They

stay there till they're 75. It could confuse the people by having them vote while there's a municipal election." Well, all I can say to the hon. members of the opposition is that sometimes democracy gets messy and sometimes democracy is imperfect and sometimes it's costly and sometimes it's confusing, but it's still better than any of the other systems that we have. As we move forward towards creating a better form of democracy in this country, it's always worth the effort.

We choose to have a federal system of government and we choose to have a bicameral Legislature because we understand that there needs to be checks and balances in this the second-largest country in the world, where somehow we have to manage to combine not only a national perspective but one that recognizes a local perspective at the same time. We're a country of very different local perspectives – we have huge diversity – and I believe that a Senate is an important cog in this experiment that we have for the rest of the world for how we can govern ourselves and do it with respect for the diversity of the people of this country and create laws that represent the will of the people. The Senate is an important cog in that, Madam Chair.

The Senate is there to be a second body of sober thought. The Senate is there to represent the interests of the provinces or the local communities and regions in this country. The Senate is there to act as a check on the power of the House of Commons, that can sometimes represent only portions of this country and not all of it.

There are problems with the Senate. We all understand that. What most Canadians don't understand is that the Senate is almost as powerful as the House of Commons – as a matter of fact, about the only thing that the Senate cannot do is initiate a money bill – and that it represents the regions of this great nation of ours: 24 from Ontario; 24 Senators from Quebec; 24 from the Maritimes; 24 from the western provinces, of which six come from Alberta; six from Newfoundland and Labrador; and one for each of the three territories.

The Senate can be a very powerful institution, but it rarely uses that power, Madam Chair, and it rarely uses it because it's unelected. It does not have in the minds of itself or in the people of this country the political right to defeat a bill that comes from the elected representatives of the House of Commons. It lacks the moral legitimacy to, on a routine basis, act and use its power of checking the powers of the House of Commons, that can become dominated by the more populous provinces in this federation. It rarely acts as a second body of sober thought with any real impact because it's not elected.

*9:50 p.m.*

Of course, this conundrum is most recently highlighted in the passing of bills C-48 and C-69 through the Senate, where it was obvious to all Senators that these were blatant attacks on Alberta and on its resources and on our ability to control our resources and our oil industry and that these bills still passed because in too many cases it believed it lacked the moral legitimacy.

Madam Chair, this is not the first time. I want to bring some context. Whether we're talking about Marc Lalonde or Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau or today's current crop of Liberal leaders, we see clearly leaders who spoke and who have created and who have passed legislation which has allowed the House of Commons, in the interests of Ontario and Quebec, to dominate this federation. The Senate has shown over the history of its existence that it is not a perfect institution and that it is often incapable of defending the legitimate interests of the less populated provinces in this federation.

It is because of these political realities, Madam Chair, over the many decades of our experiment that we call Canada, that Albertans

have fought for a better deal within Confederation. Albertans have traditionally fought for a triple-E Senate. Whether we're talking about the wake of the national energy program as it attacked Alberta's interests or whether we're talking about the more recent attacks through Bill C-48 and Bill C-69, we see that Albertans have consistently said that they want a Senate that is actually effective, they want a Senate that is elected, they want a Senate that is equal, and they want a Senate that can effectively represent the interests of Alberta. This is not unusual. Most federal systems of government have a Senate that operates as a triple-E.

If we take a look at the United States and we go back into the history of the United States, we can see that at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 the primary issue of debate would be: what kind of a Senate would the United States have? They came literally within minutes of falling on their face, of not having a Constitution, of not having the legal foundation for a United States of America as delegates left from the smaller, less populated states because they said: unless we have a triple-E Senate, we will not join this union. For six long weeks they called it "the turmoil," and it was only when the larger, more populated states agreed to an equal and elected Senate that they were capable of moving forward.

We've had our own debates through the Meech Lake accord, through the Charlottetown accord. We have consistently as Albertans lobbied for an elected Senate. We understand that to move forward with an equal Senate would mean that the federal government would have to move through legislation and that that's going to be difficult, but we in Alberta have always been the generator of new political ideas to draw this country together and to move it forward in a democratic manner.

We started with the Reform Party. Alberta led the way after looking at the push that the Reform Party brought forward for a triple-E Senate. You know, it was people like Bert Brown, an Albertan who carved "triple-E" in his greenfield. It's Albertans that have pushed for a Senate that's been elected, and finally in 1987 Alberta passed the Senatorial Selection Act.

It was my pleasure, in a small way, to work on the campaign of the first elected Senator in the history of this great nation, Stan Waters. Stan was the first Senate nominee and the first Senate nominee to be appointed to the Senate as a representative of the people of Alberta. Stan was a former military man, and he carried himself with a friendly and an outgoing nature, but there was also very much a no-nonsense, military bearing to the man. I remember travelling with him through the Yellowhead constituency as he campaigned to be our first Senate nominee. It was with great pleasure that I watched Stan Waters and eventually Bert Brown become our Senator nominees and be appointed to the Senate in Canada.

We had four Senate nominee elections in the province of Alberta between 1989 and 2012. Five of the 10 elected nominees in Alberta have been appointed to the Senate, and the Senator nominees are, we believe, more likely to fight on behalf of Albertans and for our provincial interests and to actually fulfill the role and the mandate that the Senate was supposed to have from day one.

I had the opportunity to travel on behalf of this Legislature down to Los Angeles for the National Conference of State Legislatures, and I chanced to bump into Senator Doug Black, and I can tell you that he was one of the people that spoke up at every meeting in defence of Alberta oil and gas interests in the United States. I heard him do that, and we've seen him do that with bills C-48 and C-69. He has defended the interests of Albertans wherever he has gone.

It was therefore with great consternation and great dismay that in 2016 it became apparent to myself and the opposition, the rest of my opposition colleagues, that the NDP government was not willing to renew the Senatorial Selection Act. Madam Chair, I don't

believe that I am aware of any other time in the history of this great nation when a government has actually taken away the right to the franchise, the right to vote of another group of Canadians, and they did that in 2016, when they refused to allow the renewal of the Senatorial Selection Act. Shame. Shame. How short-sighted, how dangerous when a government believes that it can take away the right to vote and the right to the franchise because they have so little respect for what the Senate is and what it could be and how it could defend the interests of Alberta. Of course, they see that they made a bad mistake because they did this at the same time that they desperately needed the Senate to have the moral legitimacy to actually intervene and defend Alberta's interests on Bill C-48 and Bill C-69.

So I am pleased today to speak to Bill 13 and to speak of my support for Bill 13. We all understand in this House that Bill 13 is not going to result in a triple-E Senate. Bill 13 will however move us forward along that path towards creating a stronger and better democracy in this country by allowing Albertans to have the opportunity to once again, through the democratic process, elect their Senate nominees so that our Prime Minister can respect the will of Albertans and appoint those duly selected Senate nominees to their rightful spot in the Senate.

Madam Chair, it is my firm conviction that Albertans have shown that they support the election of their Senators. I believe that in 2012, the last election, 1.2 million people voted in favour of a Senate nominee and took part in that Senate election. Albertans want us to move in a direction that will create a more effective Senate, one that is elected, and, hopefully, someday one that is equal.

**10:00 p.m.**

Bill 13 is not the final step, but it is, once again, a first step towards that goal that will create a better, stronger, more productive country because all of its people will have the capacity to know that they are listened to and that they have the capacity to influence the laws and the rules that will govern them. Bill 13 will restore once again to Albertans their rightful franchise, and for that reason I am very proud to support Bill 13.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I will just jump right to an amendment that I have and that I will hand over to a page. The top copy is for you, Madam Chair. I'll wait a moment till you receive it.

**The Chair:** This is amendment A3.  
Please proceed, hon. member.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm moving this on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Manning. The member moves that Bill 13, Alberta Senate Election Act, be amended in section 51 in subsection (17) in clause (b) by striking out proposed section 41.2(1.1) and substituting the following:

(1.1) With respect to an election under the Alberta Senate Election Act, no registered party and no chief financial officer of a registered party shall, with respect to each registered candidate that it has officially endorsed, incur any election expenses.

by striking out clauses (c), (d), and (e); and by striking out subsection 21(a).

I mean, the way that this bill is currently written, it appears blatantly obvious that the bill is about circumventing the elections financing rules in this province by allowing political parties to incur debt during a senatorial election. Keep in mind that this is about

provincial political parties incurring debt on behalf of senatorial candidates. In my opinion, again, if this bill truly is about the Senate, which are federal appointments, then why are provincial political parties incurring debts for this? This is about getting money, big money, back into politics and the electoral system.

As well, I've spoken at length. I don't think that this is actually democratic. I don't see the need for a provincial party to be involved at all. Through this bill, in other sections, senatorial candidates have the ability to raise and spend significant amounts of money; in fact, far more than any provincial candidate running.

So, Madam Chair, with this, I will encourage all members to vote in favour of this amendment because, once again, there's no reason for political parties to incur expenses on behalf of senatorial candidates.

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in support of this amendment. I think, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview had indicated with respect to this particular amendment, you know, the idea here that we're allowing provincial parties to incur debt that they otherwise could not incur in order to support a senatorial election is a bit troubling. I've had the great honour on behalf of our government, when we were in government, to introduce our very first bill. That bill was a bill which got union and corporate donations out of politics. I still feel incredibly strongly about that bill. I think it was an incredible move on behalf of the people of Alberta.

When we look south of the border, I think we see a very troubling circumstance where the level of influence that money has on politics is very disturbing. The number of instances in which that money has had influence with respect to things even as straightforward as lobbying on behalf of the sugar industry, lobbying on behalf of the tobacco industry, lobbying on behalf of things that generate harm to human health – but they are able down there to get folks elected who essentially owe favours to these groups and individuals. I think that's a huge challenge with the system down there.

Now, we don't have that system up here. We do certainly see money coming into politics but not to that level. And I think that's good. I think that speaks incredibly well of our society, that we don't see that kind of influence. We don't see that kind of influence peddling. We don't see the same sorts of antics that we see south of the border. I think we should protect that. I think we should do everything we can to protect that because I think it's incredibly important, moving forward, to do that. So to see this bill coming in that potentially allows sort of back doors to allow that kind of money back into politics I think is a big concern. This would help to prevent that from happening. This sort of closes a loophole that this bill would otherwise be generating.

So I definitely am in agreement with this. I think it's a good idea. I think, again, that we should do everything we can to avoid American-style sort of money-influenced, peddling-type politics.

With that, I think I will close my comments.

**The Chair:** Any other speakers to amendment A3?  
Shall I call the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:08 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

|        |        |        |
|--------|--------|--------|
| Bilous | Dach   | Notley |
| Ceci   | Ganley |        |

10:10 p.m.

Against the motion:

|                    |               |              |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Allard             | Jones         | Pon          |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | LaGrange      | Reid         |
| Copping            | Loewen        | Shandro      |
| Ellis              | Long          | Toews        |
| Fir                | McIver        | Toor         |
| Getson             | Milliken      | Turton       |
| Glubish            | Nally         | van Dijken   |
| Goodridge          | Nicolaides    | Williams     |
| Gotfried           | Nixon, Jason  | Yao          |
| Guthrie            | Nixon, Jeremy | Yaseen       |
| Issik              |               |              |
| Totals:            | For – 5       | Against – 31 |

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

**The Chair:** We are back on the main bill. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this again. I do know that, yeah, this is a fairly lengthy bill. There are a number of different parts to it. I have a question, and I'm hoping that the sponsoring minister will be willing to answer with respect to this. One of things that I always find interesting in bills is the regulation-making powers. I know that not everyone is the sort of legislative nerd that I am, but I always find it very interesting because the regulation-making powers potentially outline things that are in the bill but not really in the bill. There are sections that don't necessarily come in the bill, but then if you have strong regulation-making authority, potentially you have things coming in by way of regulation that are collateral to, associated with the bill but may not in fact be directly touched on in the bill.

The thing that particularly concerns me in the regulation authority in this case is section 27 of the bill. It begins on page 19. In this case, section 27(1)(c) is what interests me. What it says is: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations." Then it lists a couple of things, and (c) is "respecting the remuneration and expenses to be paid to a Senate nominee." Madam Chair, I think my concern with regard to talking about regulations about the remuneration that can be paid to a Senate nominee is that this suggests that what's going to happen is that someone will be elected by way of this election, and potentially there's a long time before they get appointed, years before they get appointed, and they are being given remuneration and expenses. I think that that's a pretty big concern.

I think the first question I have with respect to that is: who is it that's paying remuneration to these Senate nominees? To be clear, what we're talking about here are people who are nominated to the Senate but haven't actually been appointed yet, so at this point they are not actually performing any work. They're not doing a job. Essentially, what's happening here is that we're talking about a nominee who, again, is not yet doing the work, who has been elected but has not been appointed to the Senate so they are not working as a Senator, being paid.

Obviously, they are not going to be paid by the federal government because they're not a Senator, so I'm a little concerned that what this is saying is that we're talking about individuals – obviously, the government doesn't believe so, but I think that this idea of people being paid by the Alberta taxpayer to not do any work is actually a fairly serious issue. They obviously find it a bit funny, but I think it's a real concern. This is just an interesting regulation-making authority, that suggests that individuals are going to be paid to not do anything, that individuals are going to be paid to just wait around to one day be appointed to the Senate. I don't actually think that that is a very good use of funds. I think that that's actually a bit of a concern.

My hope is that there can be some sort of explanation provided on behalf of the sponsoring minister in respect to why it is that this particular regulation-making authority is in there, particularly if the plan is – and this suggests that it is – to essentially have these people elected and then, while they wait sometimes for eight, 10 years to get appointed to the Senate, have the Alberta taxpayer pay these individuals essentially to do no work, to do nothing of value. I think that that's a concern. I think that this House deserves to know what that remuneration is and deserves to deliberate on that remuneration and deserves to give consideration to that remuneration. I think the idea that we're going to pass an act that doesn't say directly, "Hey, we're going to pay people while they wait" and then, essentially, enable the government to pass a regulation about how much we're going to pay those people while they wait, that's a concern. I think it should be a concern to every member of this House. I think it should be a concern to members of the public.

I mean, I think it's just another question about how much this bill is going to cost the people of Alberta. Now, I'm not someone who thinks that the government should never spend money. I think the government delivers a lot of very important services, and those services need to be funded. But I'm not sure that paying folks who have been elected to one day serve in the Senate at some nebulous point in the future, potentially for years and years and years while they wait, is a good idea, particularly since what you're sort of getting here is an indirect way to pay someone.

I guess part of my concern with respect to this regulation-making authority is that you have political parties potentially supporting candidates, potentially paying to get people elected. Then, say, the election returns three or four names or whatever it is. So the first person gets appointed, but the last person may not get appointed for a number of years. In the interim the people of Alberta are going to pay this person to do what? Be on Twitter and essentially be a partisan person being paid by the Alberta taxpayer to work for a political party? I think that's a big concern.

Yeah. I think we should definitely be concerned about that, particularly when, again, we're talking about that there's no requirement on the federal government to appoint these people. So potentially, depending on who the federal government is, these people could be waiting for a really, really long time. Potentially, then, what we're doing here is that we're electing someone to sit on government salary, paid for by the people of Alberta, for an indefinite period of time and not do any work. I think that that is something we should be very deeply concerned about, and I think it's something that deserves an answer as to why it is that a regulation-making authority for that should be in there.

If the intention is to pay these people – so if that regulation-making authority is actually going to be utilized – why wouldn't there be reference to it explicitly in the bill? Why wouldn't the bill explicitly reference the fact that these people are going to be remunerated in the interim? I think the reason that it doesn't do that is because the people of Alberta would not be supportive of that. I think that if you asked the people of Alberta, "Do you want to have

an election with the municipal election to elect Senators, who may be appointed who knows when, and then to pay them for years or possibly decades on the taxpayers' dime while they don't do any work yet?" I'm not sure that that would have the same level of support.

*10:20 p.m.*

I mean, I think it's the very biggest concern in government. You know, it's exactly what allegations were over numbers of years about the former, former governments, the Progressive Conservative government, that they put folks on boards to not really do anything while they waited to be candidates. That was something that the people of Alberta didn't support. I think this is worse than that. They're not even ostensibly doing anything. They don't even appear to be doing anything. They're just not doing things, or potentially, worse still, they're being paid by the taxpayers to do partisan political work, to sit on Twitter and attack people. I think that that should be of deep concern to everyone here in this House.

That is my question on that issue. I think it's probably worth at this point, then, moving on to the bill more generally. Again, a large part of my concern about this is that it claims to do one thing, and it doesn't necessarily achieve that aim.

I think we can all agree in this House that the Senate isn't a big value-add in its present form. I think it doesn't do what we really want it to do, and I think that's a concern to everyone. I think the fact that Alberta is underrepresented in the Senate is a big concern. I think the fact that Senators are not accountable by way of election is a big concern but one that isn't necessarily addressed by this bill. Being accountable by way of election means that once you've been elected once, you're accountable to the public because you must stand for election at some point again in the future. These folks will not be in that situation as a result of this bill. So it adds elections, but it doesn't necessarily add that element of accountability because the element of accountability comes with re-election. The element of accountability comes with the fact that you come before the taxpayer again.

Also, I mean, it costs money, quite a considerable amount of money. I'm not saying that it never does anything useful, but in light of the inequality of representation, in light of the inability to hold individuals to account through future elections, I think that amount of money might be excessive.

I feel like there are solutions to that problem, but those solutions come through constitutional amendment. I think, honestly, there may need to be a bigger debate about not just whether this entity, the Senate, needs to continue to exist in its present form but whether it ought to exist at all, whether there is in fact a value-add, whether there is in fact sober second thought, as it were, occurring. I mean, I think, you know, if we look to other places, there are potentially challenges – right? – if you wind up with one Chamber having one partisan leaning and another Chamber having another partisan leaning. If people aren't able to see the common interest in the same way, you sort of get people blocking each other. So maybe that isn't an improvement. On the other hand, it seems in many ways like it might be.

Yes. I want to make it really, really clear that I'm not saying that I'm in favour of the Senate in its current form. That is absolutely not under any circumstances what I'm saying here. What I'm saying here is that I'm not sure that this bill fixes the major problems. I think that that would require a constitutional amendment. In particular, I am concerned at this stage about the idea that we may be remunerating people who have been elected but not yet appointed and are therefore being remunerated to perform no work. I think that that is a concern.

With that, I will close my comments on that and take my seat. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Madam Chair, I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 13.

[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 progress on the following bill: Bill 13. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the 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.

## Government Bills and Orders

### Third Reading

#### Bill 12

#### Royalty Guarantee Act

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

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 12, Royalty Guarantee Act.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Sorry, hon. member. We need third reading to be moved by the hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Madam Speaker. I'm excited to move third reading of Bill 12.

This binder has Bill 13 in it, so it's not very helpful to me, Madam Speaker. But I am excited as all heck to move Bill 12, to bring back some stability when it comes to royalties inside this province. I want to congratulate the hon. Energy minister on bringing it forward, one step closer to bringing stability to the industry to overcome the obstacles that were put in place by the NDP and their former Premier and her government at the time, who put in a royalty review at the exact moment that Albertans were facing a recession, one of the worst recessions in our lifetime, that would go on as a result of that decision to create great instability inside an industry that struggled as a result of that.

Now, Madam Speaker, we shouldn't be surprised by that because, of course, we know that that then Premier oversaw a cabinet that spent most of their time before they were in government protesting pipelines and the energy industry, famously her Education minister, who stood on the stairs of this Legislature chanting "no more approvals" to a crowd of protesters against the energy industry. Of course, the then Premier, now Leader of the Opposition, let Northern Gateway be killed by Justin Trudeau without a protest, stood by as Energy East was put to bed as a result of Justin Trudeau policies without a protest, in fact spoke against Keystone XL when she was in opposition, on and on and on, so Albertans probably should not have been surprised at the action that the NDP would take when they came into power.

In case you were not following along – I know there's lots of legislation moving through, Madam Speaker – the passage of this bill would be an important step in strengthening investment stability in Alberta and put an end to the uncertainty caused by royalty reviews.

There have been two recent reviews, and they both told us what we already know, Madam Speaker, that Alberta rates were competitive with other jurisdictions, including those in the United States. But these reviews came sadly at a high price, at a high price for Albertans. The uncertainty caused by not knowing if the rates would change along with not knowing when the next review would be called resulted in industry leaving our province and billions of dollars of investments flowing out of our province. The outflow of billions of dollars of investment to competitive jurisdictions has been a severe blow to our economy and has impacted everyday Albertans.

Now, this royalty guarantee would help put our province back on the right track, providing long-term stability for investment and for jobs. Through this bill we're recommending an approach that would guarantee stability, ensuring no major changes to the oil and gas royalty structure for at least 10 years while also guaranteeing that once a well starts producing, it won't be subject to a royalty change for the same time period. The existing structure and process would still provide the ability to carry out the day-to-day requirements while being able to address significant market and technology changes.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, good evening. Great to see you.

Our government takes investor stability seriously. In fact, it's not just something we talk about; we are working to make it the law.

10:30 p.m.

Now, at this point I'd also like to thank all of my colleagues in the House for supporting this bill, and with that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing the debate when it comes to the Royalty Guarantee Act. I do in particular hope that the Official Opposition will take the time to continue to support this legislation as it moves through the House and support the hon. the Energy minister and the important work that she does to begin to undo the mistakes made by the NDP government, to provide stability to this province's largest industry, and to try to support this government as we begin to try to bring back jobs, restore our economy and faith in our industries, particularly our energy industry, and, basically, to undo the mistakes that were made by the former Premier and her former cabinet and government, many of whom – I should not say most of whom; most of them, actually, were not re-elected as a result of those decisions – still sit with her in opposition.

This is an opportunity for them to show Albertans that they recognize some of the mistakes that the former Premier made that caused her to be the only Premier of a one-term government in the history of this province and that they're rethinking some of their approaches and will no longer continue to go after our largest industry and instead will show support for them, the jobs that they create and the wealth that they create in the province of Alberta, recognizing that not only do they make our province better, but they also make it the economic engine of this country. Certainly, I think that her ally in Ottawa, while he wants to continue to get her support for things like carbon taxes, may not know it, but he needs her to actually support our largest industry because it's paying many of the bills, that this country depends on, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I would ask the Official Opposition to join with the government and support this important piece of legislation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is such a lovely opportunity to get up to speak to this bill, the Royalty Guarantee Act. I need to begin, again, by just sort of commenting and noting the degree to which the Government House Leader is prone to getting up and speaking and, unfortunately, demonstrating the fact that he hasn't really read what it is he's speaking to. This, unfortunately, is yet another example of that. He truly doesn't appear to understand what this bill is designed to do, at least in theory. What this bill is designed to do is maintain in place for 10 years the rules that our government developed. This is, in effect, the UCP's celebration and approval of the royalty regime that our government put in place, yet you wouldn't know that from the talking points, which are highly disconnected from the facts, that we were all forced to listen to just now. So it's very ironic that that's what this bill is allegedly doing.

What I'm going to do is just talk a little bit about the modernized royalty framework, the one that our government put in, then I'm going to talk about the process that led to that, and then I'm going to talk about why ultimately we will not be supporting this bill although it has nothing to do with the connection between this bill and our modernized royalty framework. Quite frankly, there's almost no connection between the two. Frankly, there's not much connection between this bill and anything that impacts the oil and gas industry, but we'll get there in a moment.

This bill, of course, talks about ensuring that there's no fundamental change or restructuring to oil and gas royalties for the next 10 years, which, of course, means, then, that we are left with the current state of the royalty regime, which, as I just outlined, is a system that was put in place by our government. Now, how did we go about that, Mr. Speaker? Of course, when we ran in 2015, we made it very clear that what we were going to do was that we were going to do the work as transparently as possible to evaluate the state of play of the royalty regime in the province of Alberta to make sure that the people of Alberta were getting the best value in the most sort of sophisticated and strategic way possible for the resources that we all own.

In August 2015 our government named the royalty review advisory panel, and we included a number of people, including Calgary-based energy economist Peter Tertzakian; the mayor of Beaverlodge, Leona Hanson; the vice-chancellor of the University of Winnipeg, Annette Trimbee; and, of course, the panel chair, Dave Mowat, who I'm sure people on the other side will know from more recent hits, including the UCP's blue-ribbon panel. These are the radical, leftist, antipipeline, environmentalist, crazy people that we, of course, immediately ran to appoint to this job because, to hear the Government House Leader speak, that's all we ever planned to do, and that's all we ever did. Obviously, I'm being sarcastic, for those who are reading *Hansard*.

In fact, what we did was that we appointed a very balanced group of informed people to analyze the oil and gas royalty regime governing the province of Alberta. They set about their work. They listened to industry, they listened to labour, they listened to environmental groups, and they listened to academics, business leaders, community leaders, and thousands of other people. We had about 7,000 online responses. We had 132 documents submitted by stakeholders. They held about 65 different stakeholder meetings across the province, and they spoke to over 20,000 Albertans through telephone town halls.

Now, back in the day, when they were in opposition, a common refrain by the UCP or their predecessor parties was: "You didn't talk to enough people. You didn't consult enough." Interestingly,

what we did with the royalty review framework was that we consulted in the way I just described, which, to be clear, is very, very different than the level of consultation that preceded this bill, which I believe was the sum of zero. Anyway, two different processes.

Nonetheless, that panel did its work under the leadership of the then Energy minister, Marg McCuaig-Boyd, and they came to a number of conclusions. I'm not going to go through all of them, but in effect there was quite a fundamental shift in how the costs of industry were being calculated and how the royalties were being calculated. In essence, the shift was made to reward high-tech, efficient production but at the same time to ensure that we were encouraging more activity in a more environmental and economically sustainable way and at the same time ensuring that ultimately Albertans received a greater return.

In addition, what we did was that we built in greater transparency obligations to the system and greater reporting obligations to the system to ensure that Albertans could access and have an ongoing greater understanding of what they were receiving in the way of royalties from the production and extraction of the resource that we as Albertans all own. That is what we did.

The other element of the royalty review is that it also sort of helped lay the groundwork and set up the framework for additional efforts that we subsequently took action on with respect to encouraging and incenting additional upgrading and value-added work in the oil and gas sector. Of course, we all understood that what we needed to do was stop simply ripping and shipping and do more to upgrade and add value here in Alberta because, at the end of the day, probably the single biggest value that we get out of the resources is the jobs that they create.

Contrary to the rather ridiculous assertions, once again, made by the Government House Leader, we were not hostile to the oil and gas industry. We were not working against them. We didn't make horrendous changes that devastated the oil and gas industry. In fact, they were quite pleased with the process, and they were quite pleased with the outcome. Indeed, it demonstrates the Government House Leader's failure to understand the actual legislation that his government caucus is bringing forward in that, as I said before, the legislation itself is designed to maintain the system that our government put in place.

**10:40 p.m.**

Again, you know, I just truly wish we could just be a little bit more respectful of the facts in this House. I think it would truly help us get our work done, and I think it would raise considerably the level of respect that all members of this House enjoy from Albertans if we could be a little bit more respectful ourselves of the facts and the history.

But don't take it from me. I mean, we had a number of people comment on the modernized royalty framework that we brought into place. Peter Tertzakian, as I've already outlined, a well-known and well-respected energy economist out of Calgary, said:

The Modernized Royalty Framework was a much needed policy in Alberta to match the pace of innovation and competition in the energy industry. One year later, we have a system that meets the needs of the people of Alberta and the industries that support our resource economy. Increased drilling and capital expenditures early in the year are positive trends that are being driven by commodity price recovery, industry innovation and effective policy.

Just to be clear, that effective policy is a reference to the policy that was introduced by our government.

Tim McMillan: I think people here will know him from other common favourites like the Canadian Association of Petroleum

Producers and part of a group of folks that is generally supportive of the current Premier. 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.

Again, that was not coming from a raving environmentalist who was trying to shut down pipelines. No. That was the commentary of a strong ally of the UCP and indeed of the Premier himself, and that was what they were saying about the work our government did on the royalty review framework.

So, again, it would be really helpful, Mr. Speaker, if the Government House Leader would stop saying things that are outright misstatements of the facts such that we are in a position where his government as a whole is misrepresenting the history to the people of Alberta.

Now, another person who commented on this was Gary Leach, the president of the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada.

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.

Again, those are the comments that were made about the royalty framework that we brought in. I know that it is hard to actually listen to facts that counter the things that are being said by the leadership of this government, but it is really important that people do that.

Anyways, those are some of the people. I won't read all of them. I will simply leave that with you to outline, of course, that pretty much everything that the Government House Leader said in the introduction to this bill was inaccurate.

The reason, however, that we will not actually be voting in favour of Bill 12 has nothing to do with the merits of the modernized royalty framework or the merits of the issue of maintaining some certainty for investors or any of the things that are claimed by the government, once again inaccurately, to be the objective or the purpose of Bill 12. The reason we will be voting against Bill 12 is because Bill 12 follows a pattern that we have observed with respect to this government in a very short period of time, where there's a lot of what I would refer to as gimmick legislation, legislation that is explained to the people of Alberta or described – I'm sorry; that's a better word – to the people of Alberta as achieving a certain objective. But then, when you actually read the legislation, you learn that, no, it doesn't achieve that objective. Either it achieves something quite insidiously different than what is proposed, like, say, for instance, Bill 2, or it is simply a communications tool, an empty, fluffy communications tool that achieves nothing. Bill 7 falls into that category. I would argue that Bill 13 falls into that category.

But definitely Bill 12 falls into that category. Albertans voted for this UCP because they promised that they would end the practice of royalty reviews that create industry uncertainty. In saying that, they denied the history that our royalty review was actually ultimately accepted and welcomed by the industry. In addition, they said that they would end the practice, but then they brought in a piece of legislation that purports to end the practice for a mere 10 years, which actually is what was already included in the royalty

framework that we put in place. Then they didn't do what they said they were going to do in their platform. So it's another divergence from their platform.

On top of it, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't even do what they claim it does, even as they are diverging from their platform, because, in fact, this bill doesn't stop any significant changes to the royalty framework for 10 years. Oh, no, no, no. There are so many loopholes in this bill that you could drive 14 rigs through it tomorrow, and you could completely rewrite the royalty framework the day after.

The amusing thing about this is that it is not a Royalty Guarantee Act. It is – I'm not quite sure; what's the opposite of a guarantee? – a royalty revision act. It is an act to enable the revision of the royalty system, because there are several sections within which the government gives itself permission to ignore the guarantee. So I have no idea, Mr. Speaker, why in heaven's name they would bother bringing this piece of legislation in, because the stakeholders that they promised this to, most of them, are sufficiently informed and equipped to be able to look at this and say: "Well, this is meaningless. This is a fluffy piece of nothing. Why are they doing this?" Then presumably what they want to be able to do is hold up this piece of paper to the less informed folks within the oil and gas industry and misinform them on a consistent and ritualistic basis about what they have done.

Why does this government insist on so consistently building its record on misinformation? I do not know, Mr. Speaker. You would think that if they had the courage of their convictions, they would simply do the things they believed were right and say that they were doing them and then do them. Why we have to have this cat-and-mouse game between the facts and the objectives and the actual outcomes I have no idea. I mean, they're acting like a 25-year-old government in terms of the sneakiness of this stuff. It's really quite something.

**Mr. Bilous:** Well, the leader has a lot of experience.

**Ms Notley:** Again, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview does outline that the leader actually has been in government for a long time. Maybe he's coming at this a little bit longer in the tooth than people had actually expected, with a little bit more cynicism in said elongated tooth, because this is a very cynical bill, Mr. Speaker. Ultimately, that's why we can't support it.

The royalty review that our government did in 2015 was something we did because that was what we promised in the election of 2015. We consulted widely, fully, comprehensively with people within the oil and gas industry. When we presented the outcome of that review, we were met with almost unanimous support from within the industry. Industry doesn't want it changed.

This government ran on a platform saying, "We will not have any more royalty reviews; everything will stay the way it is," which is an implicit endorsement of what we did, so the House leader needs to stop suggesting that what we did was wrong. But then having done that, they introduce this piece of legislation, which is not a Royalty Guarantee Act; it is Permission to Revise the Royalty Regime Act. It is absolutely the opposite of what they are claiming to the people of Alberta they are doing. It is a communications gimmick. That's the best we can say. I could actually get into unparliamentary language that talks about calling something that is black white, with intention. We all know what the word might be for that. I will not use that word. I will simply call it a gimmick, and it is a gimmick that we cannot participate in.

**10:50 p.m.**

Albertans have a comprehensive, thoughtful, strategic, reasonably well-working royalty regime thanks to the work of our government, thanks to the work of the people that we appointed to the panel, thanks to the work of the thousands of Albertans who participated in it and contributed their thought, their insight, their advice, their knowledge. As a result of that, we came to rest on a solution that works for the industry. So we have a good system in place. There is no need to change it. The system itself recommends that we not change it except in exceptional circumstances. This bill changes that not one bit, so it is not really worth the paper it's written on, I'm afraid.

As much as we are happy to continue to support this government in its efforts to work appropriately and collaboratively with the industry, to grow the industry, and to create the jobs that the industry supports in this province and across the country – and we are happy to do that; that has been our record from day one – we are not happy to participate in a gimmick or an effort to mislead the people of Alberta about what this piece of legislation does.

We will continue to stand up for the oil and gas industry. We will continue to support working people within that industry. We will continue to do the work that we had started before the last election, which was to invest significantly in long-overdue value-add and upgrading efforts to get more value out of each barrel of our resources to the people of Alberta as opposed to the people of Texas or other places in the world where they are processing our product. We will continue to do that work because I think that's fundamental and that's what all Albertans want to see. They want to see more jobs here. They want to see more upgrading here. They want to see more value-add here, and I'll support this government's efforts in doing that. I absolutely will. It's something that we should be joined together on because it means creating more good jobs for Albertans and for Canadians.

But this bill isn't that at all. This bill is a bit of pulling the wool over people's eyes around what this government is actually doing, and I think, frankly – I mean, I know that you're new. I know that maybe you don't have your plans completely lined up yet, but you don't need to play games like this to make people believe you're doing something. I would suggest that you just do your homework first and then do something real rather than putting out something like this, which is meaningless and, I think, almost a bit disrespectful to people who are operating within the industry, who expect to be treated as though they are capable of reading legislation and understanding what it means. I think we can all do better.

As I said before, there were a number of good programs that we had begun work on, and I hope that we'll see them continue because those are the programs that are going to get people back to work. Not fighting with Ottawa on some unwinnable fight about Senate reform, that politicians across this country have been working on for 30 or 40 years, solely for the sake of grandstanding and political positioning but actually rolling up our sleeves to come up with the programs that will get people back to work through the kinds of programs that we had in place like PDP and others: that's the way you stand up for Albertans, not using them as a prop in a political narrative, a story that you're trying to tell across the country for some other objective that, frankly, is somewhat irrelevant to the people of Alberta.

Anyway, let's focus on getting the real job done and not pretending to do it through gimmicky pieces of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join the debate this evening? I see the Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this Bill 12, Royalty Guarantee Act. I will begin by saying that it's another piece of legislation, a feel-good kind of piece of legislation, which actually does nothing for the industry. The UCP said many things in their campaign. One of those things was that industry had uncertainty and all those kinds of things, just like they said, about our budget numbers, that we have misled Albertans about the numbers and that we have fudged the numbers. At the end of the day, when that year-end report came in, actually we saw a reduction in the deficit by \$2 billion, meaning that we were on track, and the things they said to mislead Albertans during that campaign were not true. Their own year-end report, I guess, published under their watch, confirms that.

Similarly, they said many things about the oil industry as well, and now they're just trying to put forward a piece of legislation that somehow will bring certainty to the industry or bring stability to the industry, but it's actually proposing things that are already in place through our modernized royalty framework.

I will also briefly talk about that process, that framework. As the Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned, we put together a panel, and the panel consisted of highly respected business leaders, industry leaders, academia from Alberta and beyond. They listened to industry. They listened to labour. They listened to environmental groups. They listened to academics, business leaders, community leaders, and thousands of Albertans, who are the owners of these resources. During that process they had 7,000 online responses to the questions posted through the website. They had 132 submissions from stakeholders, 65 stakeholder meetings, and they reached 22,710 Albertans through telephone town hall meetings. That shows how inclusive and thorough that process was.

What the panel found: they found that overall our royalty regime rates were comparable to other jurisdictions. They also identified certain issues in terms of crude oil, liquids, and natural gas, and they recommended that the new framework and the changes should apply to the new wells starting in 2017. They also recommended that existing royalties should remain in effect for 10 years on wells that were drilled prior to 2017. Other recommendations included that there needs to be more transparent, thorough disclosure about the calculations and royalties per project, and rightfully so, because Albertans as owners need to know how their resources are sold, how they are provided the royalties, all those things.

Our government accepted all these recommendations. We accepted all these recommendations, and the chair of the panel, Dave Mowat, former president and CEO of ATB Financial, said:

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 am pleased to see the positive reaction to it.

That was the chair of the panel saying that. The work they did included input from Albertans, from industry, from relevant stakeholders, and the recommendations they put together were, I guess, agreed-upon recommendations based on expert opinion. As I indicated, those recommendations included a guarantee of 10 years. They are trying to tell Albertans that somehow it was not there and that this act is putting that certainty there. That's, I guess, not accurate because that guarantee is already there.

**11:00 p.m.**

When we released the report in 2017, we made a number of changes to that. Certainly, those things, as they were coming from

industry, provided certainty to the energy industry. They asked us to put that 10-year guarantee there, and that guarantee was there that wells drilled before 2017 will see no change to their royalties for 10 years. By maintaining that existing structure for 10 years, industry has that certainty that they're suggesting that this bill will provide.

We also worked to set out a structure to encourage the reduction of costs in the industry, which will help them increase net revenues, and that will also help improve the return that Albertans can get on those resources. We also maintained the current oil sands royalty regime, which was examined by the panel and determined to be competitive. There were no changes to that royalty regime. We also, as recommended, provided unprecedented transparency by annually publishing a capital cost index for oil and gas wells and a wide range of data so that Albertans would be able to see how their investments are doing.

With all that, we also laid the groundwork for strategic development of value-added industry in the natural gas and oil sands sector with the establishment of a working group on energy diversification. We brought in annual performance measures against competitive jurisdictions using the principles Albertans identified as important during the review, including return to province, industry costs, investment levels, job creation, and environmental performance. With all these things in place, industry had that certainty, industry has that certainty, including that 10-year guarantee that was recommended by the panel.

If this government really wants to help the industry, I think there are a number of things that we can propose, can suggest that industry is looking for. For instance, we do know that we have production. We have the capacity to produce more, even with investments right now that exist in our resource sector. But we do know that we don't have the needed takeaway capacity, and that's exactly what industry is looking for. If we somehow create that capacity, that will certainly give them certainty. But what we saw from this government is that the oil-by-rail contracts, that would have seen oil moving by rail and creating a 120,000-barrel-per-day capacity – they are cancelling that, exactly the opposite of what industry is looking for.

When we were in charge, we worked to get TMX built, and the work our leader put in, the then Premier put in, is the reason we saw the progress on TMX, the first pipeline in more than 60 years to tidewater. We had Conservative governments here in Alberta, we had a Conservative federal government, and we didn't see that progress. Clearly, we did take the steps, the right steps, so that we can get our products to market and create that takeaway capacity that will attract investments in our resource sector.

We also stood up for Alberta interests and put forward a number of amendments when the federal government brought forward Bill C-69, and here in the House they will say that we didn't do enough to stand up against Justin Trudeau and all that. Actually, the amendments we put forward on Bill C-69 were accepted by this government, the Premier, and no other amendment was put forward by this government. They actually agreed before the Senate that the amendments that were brought forward by the then Premier, the now Leader of the Official Opposition, were great and that that's the way to go. They adopted all those amendments. Those were the kinds of things that industry was looking for.

We also increased our focus on diversification of our industry by bringing in the petrochemicals diversification program. That helped us bring new investment to Alberta. We created, in consultation with the stakeholders, two new tax credits to encourage capital investment in our province. We increased ATB Financial's borrowing limits by \$1.5 billion to support small and medium-sized business entrepreneurs so that we can attract more investments.

Those were the kinds of things that industry and stakeholders wanted, and that's why we brought forward those changes.

Now there is this bill, which is, again, a communication tool that somehow there is uncertainty about these royalties and that by bringing in this piece of legislation, they will bring that certainty back. That certainty that they are trying to guarantee in that: that was recommended by the industry, that was recommended by our Royalty Review Advisory Panel, and we accepted all those recommendations, and that certainty is already there. This will not help industry in any way to address issues that they are facing.

With that, I can also say that, like many other names of their bills, this bill is not providing any guarantee that royalties will not be changed. Actually, industry is better off relying on the guarantee that is provided to them through the Royalty Review Advisory Panel, through those recommendations, because in this piece of legislation there are many, many provisions that allow the government to tinker with the royalties and in quite a substantial manner. For instance, the legislation allows to simplify or streamline cost calculations, processes, reporting, and all those things.

*11:10 p.m.*

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment to the hon. member.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the bill?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:11 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

|                    |               |            |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Allard             | Jones         | Pon        |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | LaGrange      | Reid       |
| Copping            | Loewen        | Shandro    |
| Ellis              | Long          | Toews      |
| Fir                | McIver        | Toor       |
| Getson             | Milliken      | Turton     |
| Glubish            | Nally         | van Dijken |
| Goodridge          | Nicolaidis    | Williams   |
| Gotfried           | Nixon, Jason  | Yao        |
| Guthrie            | Nixon, Jeremy | Yaseen     |
| Issik              | Pitt          |            |

Against the motion:

|         |          |             |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Bilous  | Dach     | Notley      |
| Ceci    | Ganley   | Sabir       |
| Totals: | For – 32 | Against – 6 |

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

## Bill 2

### An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business

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

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move third reading of Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business.

For the past month this government has shown that it can and will deliver on its promises, that we are committed to following through on the very things we heard from Albertans. We committed to

restoring democracy in the workplace so that workers can make decisions free from intimidation and harassment. We committed to easing the burden on workers when they have an issue that requires review from multiple bodies, often at times that are difficult and confusing for them. We committed to ensuring that both employers and employees have flexibility on how they choose to deal with overtime. We committed to restoring fairness to general holiday pay. Finally, we committed to working without relent to get Albertans back to work.

The open for business act will reduce the burden on job creators, get Albertans back to work, give workers flexibility, and let investors know that Alberta is open for business. We know that it is the free market and entrepreneurial drive that has made Alberta the great province it is today. We want our province to continue to grow by ensuring that it is the best place to live, work, and raise a family, and this bill is part of that dream.

This bill is about creating jobs and opportunity, the very thing that has been bringing people to Alberta for over 100 years. I'm so blessed to have grown up in this province, and I want to ensure that my children and their children have the same chance. Part of that is ensuring that there are jobs, good jobs, and that each Albertan has the ability to step into the labour market and onto the labour market ladder and become part of the economic engine of this amazing province. Through Bill 2, along with the youth job creation wage, we are doing just that.

I had the opportunity to engage in a hearty debate over Bill 2, and what became clear during this time is that our government and the members opposite fundamentally disagree on the best course of action to create jobs and opportunity for all Albertans, especially our youth.

*11:30 p.m.*

Research shows that rapidly increasing the minimum wage in the face of an economic downturn has a negative impact on jobs. However, the members opposite chose to ignore those facts even when they came from the Bank of Canada. Associations representing businesses all across Alberta surveyed their members and have been able to measure the real-life consequences of raising the minimum wage by nearly 50 per cent. The consequences were that people were laid off, hours were reduced, and young people could no longer find jobs. The changes to the minimum wage and other changes that added burdens to our job creators were not victimless policy changes. They had real-life consequences on Albertans, but we are here, Mr. Speaker, to change that.

Once passed, Bill 2 will make common-sense changes to the Employment Standards Code related to holiday pay and banked overtime. With these changes, employees will qualify for general holiday pay if they work 30 days in the 12 months before the holiday. In addition, employers will no longer have to pay employees general holiday pay when the holiday lands on a day that the business isn't open. We heard from a restaurateur in Calgary that was forced to pay out \$11,000 in general holiday pay on January 1, 2018, a Monday, a day of the week the restaurant wasn't open and had never been open previously. The policies of the former government made it harder and harder for small business in this province to keep their doors open, costing Albertans thousands of jobs. Balancing workers' rights with common-sense rules for business is a change that just makes sense and one that will help our job creators get Albertans back to work.

In terms of banked overtime, we are reversing changes made in 2018 so employers and employees can once again develop straight-time banked arrangements. We heard loud and clear throughout the election that when the previous government changed banked time rules, the employers could no longer afford to give workers

overtime. Call them unintended consequences, but the implications of this were that workers were neither having their overtime paid out nor banked. This was a change that went against the wishes of workers and employers. This is a problem Bill 2 will fix. Bill 2 will allow for employees and employers to reach agreements to their mutual benefit. For all those whose overtime is paid out, there will be no change. They will continue to be paid out at one and a half hours for every hour of overtime work. For those banking time, written agreements must be present between worker and employer, and if the agreement between the employer and the employee is going to be modified or cancelled, it requires 30 days' notice.

We have heard that this bill is going to force families to cancel Christmas, but between changes like those made to the general holiday pay, banked overtime, and changes to the minimum wage, among many others, Christmas really was cancelled for many families. Over the past four years Alberta families have endured economic hardship due to the policies of the former government. Mr. Speaker, we are here to change that.

Other changes in Bill 2 will restore democracy in the workplace by returning to mandatory secret ballots for all employees when voting on union certification. Decisions on whether to join a union will be free of intimidation or harassment, a fundamental principle in a democracy. Bill 2 also gives employees the option to seek advice from a neutral source on issues related to labour law. The bill will allow the Ministry of Labour and Immigration to create a program that provides or co-ordinates support for union members or potential members who would like assistance.

Other changes will strengthen marshalling provisions currently available under the Labour Relations Code. These changes will allow marshalling orders made by the Labour Relations Board to include any related investigations or inquiries. As well, a provision is being added so that newly established bodies can be included in the marshalling efforts, and this will make the lives of workers easier by cutting red tape.

The proposed changes we've talked about today are practical and common sense. They make it easier for employers to create more jobs for Albertans, and they provide a fairer and more balanced workplace for employees. Most importantly, they reflect what we heard from regular Albertans throughout the election and offer further proof that our government will follow through on the commitments we have made.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, these changes were outlined in our platform. We were elected to get Albertans back to work in part through this open for business act, and this is exactly what we will do. In the words of our hon. Premier, "Promise made, promise kept." I urge everyone in this Chamber to support this legislation.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to join the debate on Bill 2 this evening? I see that the Leader of the Official Opposition has risen.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to begin speaking about why our caucus is adamantly opposed to this pick-your-pockets bill in third reading. This bill does not in any way, shape, or form encourage more jobs or greater business activity. What it does do is undermine the rights of the very people that this government is claiming to be supporting, and in so doing, it undermines the economy here in Alberta because taking money out of the pockets of working people means that there is less activity in our economy as a result.

Moreover, on a principle basis, it is just not our view that you create jobs by forcing people to work for less in more difficult circumstances with fewer rights. It is true that there are economies

that operate that way, but those are not economies that we want to replicate. That's not who Albertans are, Mr. Speaker. That is not the innovative, progressive, educated society that we have in this province. We are not here to provide cheap labour, where people can barely afford to make ends meet, in order to attract business. That is not the business model that we need to be pursuing in this province. We can do better, and I think Albertans expect us to do better. So this whole idea that we are going to attract business by a race to the bottom is backwards. It takes Alberta backwards. It's not who we are as a province.

What we did when we were in government was decide that we would endeavour to modernize Alberta's labour laws and bring them in line with the rest of the country. We weren't going way out on a limb or anything. What we were doing was bringing our laws in line with the rest of the country. For too long our laws had been out of step, and there were a number of examples of exploitation as a result of that.

One example, of course, that many people have heard us talk a lot about, is the matter of overtime. Up until the changes that we made, Alberta stood alone as the province in this country where people earning banked overtime were only paid at straight time. It was done in a way where it was not done by agreement. There were many opportunities for employers to drive through the legislation in order to compel workers to agree to take banked overtime at straight time. Of course, even though the rules around when you took banked overtime as opposed to paid overtime in Alberta were not dissimilar from other provinces, because in Alberta there was a difference between straight time and time and a half, there was a huge impetus and incentive for employers to drive around those rules in order to compel workers to take overtime in the banked form rather than in the paid form and therefore to have their overtime compensated at the rate of straight time rather than time and a half.

These are things that members opposite know. You know full well that this is the case, and it's somewhat duplicitous to sort of grab little pieces and pretend that that's not the case. We know that that is true. That's why employers lobbied so hard for it, for heaven's sake, because it saves them a lot of money, and it takes a lot of money out of the pockets of working people. Now, I'll be quite honest. I mean, certainly in my time, back when I was working, not in politics, I liked the idea of being able to take time instead of pay and always wanted to have the flexibility to do that, but I happened to work in an environment where I was able, because I was in a unionized environment, to negotiate those occasions.

But most workers are not in a union environment, and of course even fewer will be because of other changes proposed within this bill. As a result, we know fully that where an employer established a banked-time agreement with three or four employees in January and that's the agreement in the workplace, then because they tend to do seasonal work or project-based work and other employees come on staff, they find that that is the status quo at the job. They have no way to get out of that agreement if they want to keep the job. You know, the idea that they do have the ability, particularly in this job market, to compel the employer to rewrite the overtime agreement is fiction. It is absolute fiction, and the members opposite know it.

*11:40 p.m.*

What it means, then, is that people who were getting overtime at time and a half are now going to be jammed into arrangements where they are compelled to take their overtime in the form of banked overtime at straight time. As members opposite know, we did some rough calculations about what this would mean to the roughly 400,000 Albertans who earn overtime in the course of their

work. We relied on Statistics Canada information to come up with an understanding of the average number of hours these people worked. We also came up with an understanding of the average salaries these workers earned. We did the math, and we concluded that over 12 weeks those Albertans who work overtime stand to lose up to \$2,000. This is not small potatoes.

It's no wonder that Merit Contractors and the other people that ran well-funded third-party campaigns to support the UCP demanded that that legislation be changed. Of course they did. After running billboards supporting the UCP for the last two years, they got their reward, and the reward is being paid for by working people in this province. That's what's going on.

Let us be absolutely clear. This is not about opening Alberta for business. This is about making workers take less and earn less. Much to the point, Mr. Speaker, this is also in direct contradiction of the clear position that the Premier took to the media in writing during the election, where he said: this overtime plan will not negatively impact what people are paid. That just wasn't true. That wasn't true. We are doing something that represents a profound misrepresentation by this government to the people of Alberta, and it is one where working folks are going to see a significant reduction in what they earn.

Some people believe that the way to generate economic activity is to cut billions and billions of dollars of taxes for the very, very wealthy and then turn around and make working people earn less. That is not my view of how we build a progressive, sophisticated economy. It's the way you build a regressive, exploitive economy where we only succeed in racing further and further to the bottom and in reducing the opportunities for a growing majority of the population year after year after year.

There are other elements to this bill which are equally problematic. Of course, the members opposite have heard about that from many of the people in our caucus, all of whom have had the opportunity to speak about how offended they are by the pick-your-pockets elements of this bill and the attack on working people that it represents. We, of course, see the changes that are being proposed with respect to general holiday pay, and once again we see that Alberta will be out of step with almost every other province in Canada by making an unfair distinction. We pay less overtime and we give less general holiday pay because apparently Alberta workers aren't worth it. They're just not worth it. This government is saying to working people in Alberta who earn a wage that they're just not as worth while as workers in B.C. or Saskatchewan or Manitoba or Ontario or Quebec or anywhere else. If you are a working person in Alberta, you are worth less than people in other parts of the country: that is the message that the members of this government are saying to working people across this province.

The same, of course, is to be said about eligibility requirements for general holiday pay. Now, there are some provinces that do have eligibility requirements but not Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, or Quebec. Apparently, in Alberta we're not as good as the workers in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, or Quebec, and therefore we have to work longer in order to become eligible for general holiday pay. That is apparently the decision and the belief of the UCP and their Premier.

Then, of course, we have talked at some length as well about the issue of the changes to the Labour Relations Code. Again, the members opposite persist in discussing the fiction that somehow as a result of the card check process union organizers are able to sneak into the workplace and intimidate working people and that meanwhile employers, who actually have legal care and control of the workplace as described by the courts, have no capacity to control or intimidate people and that therefore the card check process is somehow undemocratic and that what we need to do

instead is give employers, who have complete care and control of the workplace as determined repeatedly by the courts, the opportunity to exercise their care and control of the workplace in a way to discourage people from choosing to join a union.

Once again, we have decided that because the UCP – I mean, we've seen it, quite honestly, from statements made by the hon. Premier. You know, he talks about union thugs. This guy has a clear hostility to unions. He absolutely has no respect for the constitutionally protected rights of individuals to come together in order to assert their rights and to grow their economic livelihood, and he fundamentally distrusts unions and the rights that they represent and, I guess, through them, the individual rights of working people.

That is a target of hostility for this Premier, and therefore anything that can be done to undermine an agency that would give some level of equality and voice or agency to individual workers in a setting where they otherwise are legally bound to follow the complete direction and care and demands of the employer, that is something that the Premier believes is fundamentally incorrect and wrong. Therefore, anything that we can do to undermine unions is a good thing in the eyes of this Premier, notwithstanding that the courts have examined in great detail the way unions work, the rights of working people, and the interaction between those things and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is something that, from an ideological perspective, the Premier is very, very much opposed to.

Then, finally, although it's not specifically contained in this act, we do of course have references to the decision already to pick the pockets of the most vulnerable workers in society, which are those young workers under the age of 18. That process has officially begun under the watch of this government. They sort of sat around in a room and thought: "Who are the absolute most vulnerable workers we could take a run at? Is it the retired people? No. They're pretty good at lobbying these days. Might it be folks who struggle with disabilities? Well, no. I mean, you know, it's kind of politically difficult to take a run at them. I know. How about people who can't vote, who are under 18? Let's take a run at them." So they did.

*11:50 p.m.*

But it really does not speak highly to the notion of fairness or equality. We, of course, have heard from countless workers, countless employers who will talk about how what they do is that they pay people on the basis of the quality of their work. They don't care when they were born. They don't care if they have classes the next day or not. Those are ridiculous criteria. Obviously, this legislation is protected from the Canadian Charter challenge, likely because they are under 18. Again, another convenient group to target, but still it is a vulnerable group that this government has chosen to target.

Now, of course, they love to make this ridiculous argument about: well, the minimum wage means that that's why youth unemployment is so high. Well, in fact, what we know is that in economy after economy after economy and jurisdiction after jurisdiction after jurisdiction, when employment drops, young workers are the first to feel the effects, and that is just a thing that happens. To suggest that the unemployment rate for young people is high in Alberta because of the minimum wage is an illogical argument which is not backed by the evidence or the facts. As we've said many times, just look next door to Saskatchewan, that didn't raise its minimum wage. Their youth unemployment rate is equally high because they, too, were subjected to the slowdown created by the drop in the price of oil.

Moreover, the reality is that what you're going to see now – and I absolutely predict it; we all know it's going to be true – is that the

unemployment rate amongst young people between the ages of 18 to 20 is probably going to shoot up because they're going to be competing now with these kids that are 16 and 17. They're going to find it that much harder to find work. Quite frankly, you know, when you're 18 or 19 or 20 and you're just leaving home, that's probably when you need work even more. There's going to be this huge disincentive.

All around, it's just a bad idea for so many reasons. We, of course, have been pleased to outline that, in fact, you know, Ralph Klein's government recognized that it was a mean-spirited strategy that achieved no measurable policy objectives and that it needed to be abandoned. Now it's, of course, sort of a back-to-the-future moment here, where we are actually going back to before Ralph Klein and making mistakes that we should have long since moved away from.

Now, it is interesting. We just heard, generally speaking, in the introduction to third reading by the minister that he didn't just speak about the minimum wage as it relates to young people, but he also spoke in broad terms about how the minimum wage overall was just a very bad thing for our economy, that people lost their jobs, yada, yada, yada. Interesting that we're starting to hear that language. I'm curious because, of course, in the last election, again, the Premier very clearly stated that he would not go after the minimum wage for anyone other than young people and, you know, fingers crossed in the mind of the Premier, hopefully, women who serve alcohol in restaurants, because I'm sure that for whatever reason the Premier is not a big fan of theirs either. But, generally speaking, outside of women who serve alcohol in restaurants and young people, the Premier committed that the minimum wage would remain intact.

Yet it's interesting listening to the minister of labour because it really starts to sound like, overall, you have some concerns with the minimum wage. Now, obviously, the Premier understood that it was a very, very popular decision and that the vast majority of Albertans supported it pretty much from day one. I'm curious as to whether what we're now starting to do is start to move towards actually breaking that promise as well. I certainly hope not because, you know, again, it would be yet another broken promise by this Premier. Nonetheless, it is troubling that we are going after it with respect to youth, young people and students.

It's also very concerning, as I've said before, this notion of considering a liquor server differential. Just to be clear, I mean, I've been in this House since 2008. I sat on committees where the lobbyists for the restaurant association came to the committee and begged us to drop the minimum wage for people who serve liquor, and they came in with all their stories about the tips and yada, yada, yada. Then, of course, we would have other people come in. You know, we had weeks and weeks and weeks of hearings on these things back in – I don't know – 2008, 2009. I can't remember exactly when. Other people would come in. Economists would come in, and they'd say: well, actually, all of the stuff that the lobbyists for the restaurant association were telling you is mostly not true; here are the stats, and here's what we see.

Interestingly, I remember we actually had the Catholic bishops come in to speak to the committee, and to their credit they said: this is almost immoral, to suggest that we reduce the minimum wage for certain sectors of the population like this. They talked about poverty, and they talked about the impact of and the growth in poverty that would be experienced if that approach had been taken. I hadn't really expected that. I was just, you know, a fairly new MLA sitting on this committee, and I was very impressed with the depth and breadth of the representations that were made to that committee, not just by the normal sort of antipoverty activists, not in any way to diminish, of course, what they would say, but by a broad swath of people outside of the antipoverty groups, talking

about how bad dropping the minimum wage for anybody would be in our society and in our communities and talking about how much our communities depended on people who earn the minimum wage to contribute to the economy.

I would certainly urge the minister to review the submissions that were made at that review, that was, as I say, I think around 2009, 2010, something like that, because it was quite compelling. In fact, it's interesting because at that time, if I recall, the committee recommended against any kind of differential wage of any type. Then what happened, I think, at that time was that the Premier's office overruled it, but the committee itself, including the government members of the committee, had been quite taken with the depth and breadth of the submissions that they had considered.

That's why, of course, this idea, this ridiculousness – I mean, I don't know how many people over there have worked as waiters or waitresses in the service sector. Certainly, I've done my time there. I can tell you that nobody plans their life on the basis of tips. There are no rules, of course, around how much of the tips get kept by the servers in many jurisdictions. Often, you know, you'll have the same restaurant owners, who insist that their workers are overpaid because they get too many tips, actually then reach in and say: well, we demand that we get X percentage of your tips. Of course, there are no laws against that either.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

More to the point, the amount of tips that a waitress or waiter can earn is very much dependent on the employer. You can earn great tips if your employer invests in food and systems and the environment and all of those kinds of things that attract people that are going to give the tips – the kind of service or the kind of, you know, quality of the experience is going to generate people or encourage people to give tips – or you can run your restaurant in a way where the staff are run off their feet so that they are not typically getting as many tips because, quite frankly, they're fixing salads, they're doing dishes, they're isn't enough space to get drinks fast, or they're waiting in line. All the kinds of things that require good investment to provide good service: some restaurant owners won't make those changes. Who pays the cost of that? The servers. So then their tips go down. Anyway, I mean, this is just one of a thousand examples around the variability of tips.

*12:00 a.m.*

Frankly, as a woman, you know, you can get lots of great tips or you cannot get lots of great tips depending on what you're wearing, the height of your heels, how you respond to inappropriate jokes, all those kinds of things. And, quite frankly, those are not the things that should define what you earn in Alberta. We know that the majority of servers are women, and we know that when you're serving alcohol, that kind of dynamic is actually enhanced and accelerated. So you are actually creating a situation where women are almost putting themselves in some level of jeopardy in order to earn an appropriate income. I mean, it's just a mess all around. I can't imagine why anyone would ever think that was a good idea.

Anyway, I know that's not directly part of this bill, but obviously in association with announcing this bill, there was talk about setting up this minimum wage panel that is going to look at these things. It is a recipe for, you know, exploitation and abuse by employers but also abuse of the serving staff themselves, who are primarily women.

All in all, I would argue that there are many things this government can do to create more economic opportunity for Albertans. I would say again that we should start from the starting point that each and every Albertan has a right to earn enough money to be able to enjoy a reasonable quality of life for themselves and

their family. We should not be creating an economy that is built on people living below the poverty line. If we have to have people who are working in this province living below the poverty line in order to attract business, then we are not doing it right because in this province, in this country we can and should be able to do better.

We should build an economy based on innovation, on education, on aspiring to lead the country and the world in terms of economic diversification, economic innovation, technological innovation, those kinds of things. That's what we should be aspiring to do. We should not be aspiring to create an impoverished underclass so that we can attract businesses who rely on that business model to make money. Quite frankly, if that's the business model you need to rely on to make money, it's not a business that should be doing well. A business that needs to exploit others to make money, a business that needs to exploit its employees to make money: that's not the kind of business that we should have in Alberta. We need businesses that contribute to the economy, that grow productivity, that grow the economy overall, and create good jobs so that workers can live good lives. By "good lives" I don't mean that everybody needs to have everything, but we should be building an economy where people are technically and functionally living above the poverty line.

In effect, this whole notion of Bill 2 is this idea that that's what we have to do, that we have to allow for a situation where employers can exploit workers. I mean, this whole idea that by suppressing workers' rights, we attract business: underlying that is this idea that business will come if they can force their employees to work for less, to take less, and in many cases to live under the poverty line. I just don't understand why we would need to do that. We have so much in Alberta. We have so many resources. We have the youngest, most well-educated, growing population in the country, and we have so many tools to work with in order to grow and restore job creation in this province.

Quite frankly, I mean, even if this were to work the way the members opposite think it will, which I don't think it actually will, but even if it were to, if you march in here a year from now and say, "Oh, look; this bill created 10,000 more jobs, and they're all jobs where they're paying \$13 an hour," well, big deal. I mean, is that the model of economic growth that we want in this province? That's not what Albertans are looking for. It's not what they're used to. Albertans have had the benefit of a great deal of prosperity. Now we're struggling. Now many, many people are struggling, and all of us need to be very, very seized with how we move through the challenges that many, many working people in this province are facing right now. But the way to do it isn't to create a bunch of McJobs and say: oh, look; I've taken this \$80,000-a-year job and replaced it with a \$13-an-hour job. I mean, that's not a win.

About two years before the election we had introduced the first round of the PDP program, one of the first major investments in significantly upgrading and adding value to our oil and gas sector in about 20 years. It was designed to attract other investment and for more manufacturing to build off it because we were creating inexpensive feedstock for other manufacturing associated with it. We had done a good deal of research and been working with a number of different companies and believed that we could level up again and continue that process.

It was an incentive program for these businesses where they got tax breaks, but we still ended up with incremental income because this was income that we were pretty sure we weren't going to get otherwise, and we were creating jobs, attracting high-paying jobs that actually then, as I said, created sort of hubs of activity that would then, without any government activity, attract further jobs because we were doing things that weren't being done in other parts of Canada and only one or two other places on the continent.

Those kinds of things are where you leverage the tremendous assets that this province has to incent the creation of those kinds of well-paying, long-term jobs that require people with good educations. At the same time we were investing in our education system to create more high-tech positions in order to ensure that Albertans could get the education they needed to be prepared for the jobs that were actually out there.

I'm sure many people here are aware that high-tech employers were complaining, saying: "Well, you know, yes, Alberta is one of the best educated provinces in the country, and, yes, you have this very young, diverse workforce, but you're trained in the wrong stuff, and we need you to be better able at this stuff. Yet we have some core components that are going to attract our businesses to you: good infrastructure, good tech infrastructure, a high-quality of life, those kinds of things, but we still need people that actually have the skills that we need." So we announced 3,000 new high-tech spaces across the province to try and get people, not only young people but people that needed to retrain, to be able to go into these new jobs.

That's the kind of thing that you do. You don't strip away people's basic rights and invite employers to come in to pay below poverty rates and then work to kill unionization so that you can suppress wages. That's not a job-creation strategy. What you want to do is work more strategically to create the kinds of jobs that Alberta has the capacity to create.

Again, that's why I think that this is absolutely the wrong direction. What we know for sure, what we can touch and feel and count, is the absence of money in the pockets of working people. In return for that, we have no guarantees of additional jobs, additional investment, any of these kinds of things. We know – yeah – we just have no guarantees of that. There is no evidence of that. There's no evidence of that in the literature. There's no evidence of that from economists. This is simply a response to lobbyists. It's a response to, as I said before, the Merit Contractors and others like them. It sells out hard-working people who need every bit of money that they earn in order to support themselves and their families.

*12:10 a.m.*

At the end of the day, this is effectively a clear example of the differences between the governing party and our party. We believe that we move forward if all Albertans move forward. We believe that inequality is, in fact, an impediment to economic growth, and it is an impediment to quality of life. Members opposite seem to think that inequality is, in fact, itself an economic strategy. I think it's an economic strategy for a very small group of shareholders. It is not an economic strategy for a province or a community. That's the fundamental difference between the governing party and ours, and that is why I'm sure it will come as no surprise to members opposite that we will not be changing our position on this bill at this stage from the position that we took at the first stage, the second, and at committee. We will in fact be adamantly opposing it as we work to stand up for the people whose pockets will be significantly emptier as a result of this bill.

Again, I don't believe that this will do what the members opposite suggest it will. It is not about attracting business. It is simply about taking money from working people and giving it to well-organized employer groups who contributed significant amounts to the election of the current government. That is an unfortunate choice on the part of the government, and eventually, again, as I say, we'll also, I believe, see Albertans coming to realize that the Premier was not entirely honest with them in the last election on this matter of overtime and that what he said did not reflect what the intention was at the time nor what is happening in this bill now. So there is a

disconnect between what the Premier said to voters and what he is delivering now.

Ultimately, people will lose patience with that approach to governance, and I suspect they will particularly lose patience given the amount of money that this change reflects. But I suppose we shall see. In the meantime we will be certainly here to do everything we can to stand up for working people in Alberta and to be their voice and to continue, outside of this bill, to find as many places as we can to support this government if they do at some point begin to walk down the path of actually trying to create high-value jobs that people can count on from day to day, where they earn enough to genuinely support themselves and their families.

Should they come up with strategies that actually secure those kinds of outcomes, you can bet we'll be right there beside them, because I know that all Albertans do share a tremendous desire to have more jobs and to see the economy grow, and I do think that we all share in that desire in this House. I look forward to the day when we're able to see the members opposite come forward with the kinds of plans that will secure exactly that outcome for the people of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon members, are there any others wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This isn't actually, I think, the first time that I've had the misfortune of following our leader, so I will endeavour to be at least half as eloquent.

There are a lot of technical things I could say about this bill, but I think the first thing worth noting about it is that primarily my objection comes, actually, from the very thing that I would say was the thing that drove me into politics in the first place, and that is income inequality. I don't think that we build a stronger society by having some people make 1,000 times more than other people do. Now, I'm not suggesting by any means that everyone should make the same regardless of their background or training or experience or what it is they do. I definitely don't think that that's the case. But what does concern me is the trend that we've seen over the last 20 or 30 years, where people who are working jobs are not in a position that they can afford to meet their basic needs. They're not in a position where they can buy houses and put away savings and afford for their children to go to school. I don't think that that creates a better society. I think that a better society is one in which people who are working full-time are able to do that. I'm not suggesting that they should have a lavish lifestyle, but I'm suggesting that, you know, food and shelter should not be out of their reach.

That is why I'm so troubled by bills like this because it does exactly that. It takes away from those who have the least and gives to those who have the most, and I don't think it is a strategy that will diversify the economy. I don't think it is a strategy that will create additional jobs. I think there's a lot of evidence out there and there's a lot of research that's been done that suggests that taking from those who have the least and giving to those who have the most does not drive your economy.

I think that even if we look at it from sort of a hypothetical perspective, even if we consider, say, a small coffee shop in which you have 10 people on shift at any given point in time, and those 10 people are the number of people that are necessary to do the work given how busy the coffee shop is, I think that if you take those 10 people and instead of paying them \$15 an hour you pay them \$13 an hour, that isn't going to cause the employer to go out and hire an

11th person even though the amount of work hasn't changed. I don't think anybody runs a business like that. I think it would be crazy to run a business like that. You wouldn't hire another person to do work that doesn't exist. That's just not how it works.

So I think this idea that we generate jobs by taking away from those who have the least just doesn't work. By contrast, if we actually pay those front-line coffee shop workers a little bit more – they are people who have less, who probably can't afford to purchase a coffee at a coffee shop, who are probably struggling to pay for their groceries and their rent – they're way more likely to go out and buy a coffee at that shop, which drives demand for the coffee in the shop, and that driving of demand is actually what will cause that employer to hire an 11th person.

I think that there is an enormous amount of good analysis out there that would lead us to believe that, but I think that even if we sit back and reflect on it, it's more obvious that putting money in the hands of those who have less has more of a beneficial impact on the economy than putting money in the hands of those who have more. This bill clearly does the opposite of what I would like it to do. It puts money in the hands of those who have more and takes it away from those who have less. It takes it away in the form of overtime. It takes it away in the form of compensation. It takes it away by removing the rights of workers to unionize and thereby sort of driving down wages throughout sectors of the economy in which people are already paid less. I think that that is really, really sad.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out on several occasions, that isn't a business model we should be striving to create here in Alberta. I don't think we should be engaged in a race to the bottom. I think that we have an intelligent, educated – I think this is one of the best places in the world to live. I think that we should have faith in those people and their ability to move forward and to generate a better economy that doesn't require that we race to the bottom, that doesn't require that we take from those who have the least, that doesn't require that we rely upon the labour of those who at the end of the day are having trouble affording shelter and food, just the basics.

*12:20 a.m.*

That is probably one of the things that is most troubling about this to me. I think we've seen this from the government on a number of fronts the idea of putting money in the hands of the richest in terms of the economy. I think it's wrong on a number of bases, but quite apart from talking about the incomes that people earn, I think another thing worth talking about is what people come into all this. Say that you turn 18. You've come from a certain background. I was lucky. I came from a background in which my parents were educated, and they were able to pay for me to go to university. I had savings already when I turned 18 as a result of money that had accumulated, you know, in the forms of birthday gifts from my grandparents, that sort of thing.

Many people don't have that. Many people, say, have come from a family who doesn't have those sorts of means. They've had to start working when they were 15, 16 years old, and if they're lucky, they save enough to go to university. Some people have come to the country recently. Their parents have come to the country recently. They're working multiple jobs just to try to make ends meet, and they're young people who are working, they're 15- and 16-year-olds who are working. They're not even working to save for university. They're working to help put food on the family table.

I think the idea that we should ensure that we're giving cuts on profits, on corporate profits that go to shareholders, that go to

people who have come forward who have money to invest, and that we should take that money away from people who don't have anything, who don't have any money to put in and all they have to put in is their hard work and their dedication and their labour, I don't think that builds a better society. I think that those people who come into it who don't have capital when they hit the age of 18 and all they have to contribute is their hard work and they don't have any money, those people should have just as much chance to build a life, to raise their children, to put their children in postsecondary as anyone else has. That's what troubles me about bills like this and several other ones we've seen.

Another problem that I have with this bill is that they talk about making Alberta open for business, and they talk about driving the economy, but I think it sort of misunderstands what we're talking about. An economy, I mean, at the end of the day sort of philosophically is a relation amongst things. It's how we sort of distribute goods and how we distribute money. We're making choices. We're making choices about how we distribute those different things, and when we make the choice to continue to put more money into the hands of the wealthy, again, I don't think there's any evidence that that grows the economy, and I don't think that that's the kind of growth that we want to inspire, quite apart from the fact that it doesn't grow the economy. I think that there are other things that do grow the economy and do it better. I think investment in education, in diversification, in ensuring that we have skills training, investment in those who have the least to bring them up to a reasonable standard of living so that they themselves are able to contribute to that economy as well: I think all of those things have a beneficial impact.

I also think one of the things that I find troubling about this is, of course, that we do tend to be arguing about facts. The essential philosophical divide is that the current government thinks that when you put more money in the hands of those who are wealthy, it grows the economy. Those of us in the opposition side think that when you put more money in the hands of those who are in the middle class or below, that grows the economy. I think that, you know, there have been papers written on either side, but one of the things that really bothers me is the intentional misuse of numbers. We've seen that in this House. We've seen the minister of labour stand and refer to the youth unemployment rate, of course, never making mention of the fact that it's the same in Saskatchewan and they haven't raised their minimum wage at all, so in fact the two things are not causal in that way. I think that sort of thing bothers me. I think that not trying to talk to the public in as real a way as possible really, really bothers me.

One of my favourite classes at school – it was actually in my first degree, which is in psychology – was a class on the use of statistics in experimental methodology. That class had a huge impact on me going forward because it enabled me to do a thing that I actually think we should train all children in our schools to do, and that is to analyze the information that was coming in at me. It is possible to say only things that are true and still misrepresent the situation. If we strategically pick those things which we say and exclude other facts that would alter the picture, we can say only things that are true and still leave a vastly misrepresented picture for the public.

You know, I think of the Manning Centre and the Fraser Institute, all these places whose purpose of existence is to do exactly that, to create a misleading picture by using selective statistics and using selective studies and failing to have appropriate control groups. It really bothers me because I think that it's people intentionally misusing the information that they have. I don't think that that is how democracy is supposed to work at the end of the day. I think it leads us to make poor decisions like the poor decision that, in my view, is being made right now with this bill.

I think there are a couple of things that are worth commenting on in specific. One of the things that I would like to comment on is this idea around voluntary agreement around banked overtime. Sure, voluntary, but when courts analyze contracts, often even in contracts which are – I mean, arguably all contracts are quote, unquote, voluntarily entered into, and there is still an analysis performed of that voluntariness. Now, you have to reach a really high standard to hit unconscionable, but it is sometimes the case that there is a recognition of that. In fact, even in cases where we're not voiding a contract, where we're not saying that it's unconscionable, the court will recognize a disparity in bargaining power. That disparity in bargaining power can, in combination with other factors, add up to a situation in which the contract is considered inappropriate.

I really think that these quote, unquote, contracts to voluntarily have your overtime banked at straight time are a huge example. I'm not saying in every case. I'm sure there are some in which people are genuinely voluntarily entering into them, but I think there are a lot in which they aren't. I say that because before I went to law school, I took a job in which I voluntarily entered into such an agreement. I wasn't even aware that I had voluntarily entered into such an agreement or that I had a right to decline to enter into such an agreement. You know, I signed a stack of paperwork probably at least 100 pages thick with signatures and initials, and I went off to this job. It was always the case that there was no getting paid out for your overtime. You banked your overtime, and it was because you banked at straight time.

At the time I was already a university-educated person, fairly intelligent, and I guess that's all I have to say about that.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Rachel said . . .

**The Speaker:** I would caution the Government House Leader for using names inside of this Assembly.

The Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

*12:30 a.m.*

**Member Ceci:** Well, I was listening, and I think you got to the point, hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, where you were talking about not knowing that you had signed away your time and a half because it was built in at straight time. If you'd like to finish that, I'd love to hear it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much. I think, essentially, where I was going with that is that I was a reasonably informed person at the time, yet I had signed this not knowing that I had signed this. In fact, I didn't know that I had any right not to sign it. So I think the voluntariness of this is what we sometimes refer to as a legal fiction, which is to say that we act as though it's voluntary, but in fact it's not voluntary. We use legal fictions all the time. They do sort of misrepresent the universe to a certain degree. I think that is a big concern.

One of the other pieces of this bill that I think would be worth commenting on is just the piece around the youth minimum wage, because there's a whole bunch of things that trouble me about it, one of which has to do with the fact that if you're in school versus not in school, that has an impact. I think this idea that we should go delving into people's lives and determine what they're doing with their money in order to decide what they're worth paying and that we decide on the basis of their age that they're not doing anything

useful with their money and therefore they don't need to be paid the same thing or they're not worth as much on the basis of the fact that they're still in school, that somehow they don't need the money or they're not using it appropriately – I think that just delving into people's lives in a way that concerns itself with whether or not we think they're deserving of the money or they're going to use it appropriately is pretty troubling to me.

At the time I think the phrase that was used about it was: people of lesser human capital. That phrase concerns me also because in this case we're referring to youth workers, but I kind of wonder where it could be extended to, and that is, I think, something that will continue to be very, very troubling.

With that, I think I will close and simply say that the reason that I oppose this bill is because I don't believe it has economic benefits and I do believe that it creates greater income inequality. I do believe that it puts more and more Albertans in a position where they are not able to meet their basic needs, and I fundamentally believe that those who work full-time should be able to afford food and shelter and to put their kids in school.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there are approximately two minutes remaining in Standing Order 29(2)(a). Does anyone else have a brief question or comment that they'd like to make?

Seeing none, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is very excited to rise this evening.

**Mr. Dach:** I am indeed, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I'm always excited to rise in the House to speak to any piece of legislation. I do warn all members present in the House that I'm about to enter into another one of my in-depth technical analyses of legislation before the House, so get your pencils and rulers ready, and we'll see how deep a dive we get into today.

Tell you what, Mr. Speaker, if I thought my efforts tonight speaking to Bill 2 would result in convincing members opposite to vote against the bill, I'd speak until 2023. So just nod across the way if indeed you think that's something that would be even possible in the deepest, darkest realm of possibility, and I'll keep talking and keep changing the calendar, because it's that important to us on this side of the House to ensure that this bill never sees the light of day although the government seems intent on passing it. We're going to continue to ensure that the voices of those who are affected by this piece of legislation are heard loud and clear through us in the Official Opposition.

It appears as though the government wants to go back to old norms rather than the new normal, that breathed a breath of fresh air in the province over the four years during our government's reign. The new normal had a foothold for a while, but the old norms seem to be what this government is intent on going back to, dragging people down rather than lifting people up. We know that during the downturn, due to the price of oil, people were hurting because of that downturn in our oil industry, and the answer that the government has to this now, this current government, is to spread the pain. The government's role, they believe, is to enforce austerity economics, and we definitely are opposed to that attitude.

We had in the party I represent, the New Democratic Party of Alberta, a magazine. Actually, it was a newsprint magazine that went on for a number of different iterations, but one of the titles that it had for a long time – it was a newsprint magazine. It came out quarterly when we could afford to do it when we were struggling as a party. It was called vision in action, and that magazine is titled with a title that I think encompasses what we did as a government in the four years that we were in power, that we intend to do once again; that is, to make sure that we're always driven by a vision that's put into action to benefit Albertans, to move people forward

with a very positive notion of what the future is all about, because, indeed, we've always been a forward-looking party. I think that Albertans expect that.

The population has changed. The demographics have changed in this province over the last decade or more, and people from all across the country have moved here. We're one of the youngest jurisdictions in North America. I believe we're the youngest jurisdiction in Canada. Individuals who have that youth and that drive and that idealism don't wish to be dragged down by leadership that wants to take them back into their past and plant them in the dustbin of history and say that economic downturns are something that you're going to have to pay for with an austerity budget that's going to end up maybe balancing the budget, but it's going to put your family in the hole for a whole generation, and your children are going to suffer as well.

That's what Bill 2 is doing. It does things that punish people. It's no fault of their own if they're in a situation that they're in, whether they're young people or students working to go to school or whether they're in the oil patch and they've had to take on a different job, maybe a lower paying job. Any time that we've seen a downturn in the cycle in this province that has resulted in losses of employment, Conservative governments have responded with austerity measures, and they've taken a deep dive to balance the budget on the backs of working people so that they can create the so-called environment that business thrives in. That has been a failed experiment time and time again, and we're going down that same garden path. It's evidenced by Bill 2 that this government has learned nothing from the mistakes of past Conservative governments that adopted austerity politics, austerity measures of economics, and trickle-down economics to attempt to right the economic ship, as they say.

We saw a very different way of doing things. With our vision we took action, and we always will say that you should be looking forward. We did things like value-added processing and tried to incent that. We were looking to promote artificial intelligence investments. We are looking at new technology adoption. We were looking at diversifying our markets for all our products: agricultural, petroleum, intellectual. All these things are exciting, new, forward-looking technologies, and it's a vision that the current government seems to be lacking. Like, they just seem to be focusing on the problems that we have and seeing that the solution is to cocoon ourselves.

You've got a couple of choices. If you're under siege economically, as we are in Alberta, you can batten down the hatches and take a deep dive, or you can do something to empower your people to fight back, using every tool that the government has and can muster, and proactively drive consumer demand by putting money in the pockets of people who actually will spend it to generate economic activity. Consumer spending: 70 per cent of our economy.

*12:40 a.m.*

As the previous speaker just alluded to, there's a philosophical divide that is very evident here, and it's something that seems to be driving all the conversations on both sides of the House. The government of the day believes that trickle-down economics works, where if you put money in the hands of those people who have the most in society, they will spend it and invest and create jobs. That has been discredited for decades. We know that if you put money in the hands of the people who are at the lowest rungs of society or in the middle class or lower, they will spend it. They don't have the capacity to save, necessarily. They will put that money into the economy and thereby create employment.

It's commonly known that 70 per cent of your economy is consumer spending. Your small businesses thrive in that atmosphere because people will be locally spending and not investing just simply to create shareholder value and dividends. They spend it locally, and it gets invested and cycled and grows in your economy. That's been proven time and time again. Yet this current government seems to be continuing to drink the Kool-Aid of the Austrian school of economics or trickle-down or Reaganomics, whatever title you want to give. That is something that we will always be diametrically opposed to.

Now, I listened to a couple of our MLAs talking about their working in restaurants, and I don't know if I've spoken about the work that I've done in restaurants yet, but I actually did work in a restaurant. There used to be a restaurant called Franklin's that was on Mayfield Road and 112 Avenue, and I wasn't waiting tables – I was a cook; it was a university job, and I was there quite often on the night shift till 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning – but I did get a chance to observe the many servers, particularly women, who were having to suffer the ignominy of doing some of the things that our previous speakers talked about, where they, in order to earn the tips that they hoped to earn to get a living wage out of the work that they were providing, were wearing clothing that would perhaps encourage a tip. They were shutting their ears and shutting their mouths to the lewd language that was coming from some of the customers, especially after drinks were consumed.

They were wearing high heels that were pretty dangerous to wear, especially on the floor. I know that in the kitchen, in order to preserve the safety of our kitchen staff, we would actually salt the floors. We would throw salt on the floors, and that was a fairly common thing to do in a restaurant with a slick tile floor. You throw salt down. They get greasy and oily in front of the food prep areas, and so that you don't end up having slip-and-fall injuries, you throw salt down. But it didn't help much when you were having your servers come in from the restaurant area wearing the high heels on a slippery floor like that, and yet these young women, you know, were put in that position because of the fact that the wages that they had been forced to work for didn't bring their earnings up to a proper living wage.

The tips that they relied upon were pooled on top of that, and then they were skimmed. They were gathered together, and then the management actually took a percentage of those pooled tips. There was an excuse about needing to take that in an effort to – I'm not sure what – pad the bottom line. It was apparently an effort to create enough money to pay the costs of keeping the restaurant open. But the workers knew exactly what it was. It was basically the owner taking a percentage of the tips and putting it in the pocket of the restaurant and the bottom line of the restaurant. They didn't have anything to say about it. It was a situation where they either accepted that or didn't work there.

That's a part of the old norms that this government wants to go back to. Frankly, I'm very convinced that the people that I'm talking to in my constituency who are working in these restaurants are not going to forget. The attempt to roll back the clock by this government is very much stuck in the minds of people who are working in the restaurant industry, for sure, who are young people, who are student workers, who are under 18 years of age, between 16 and 18, who are suffering a wage rollback in many cases or are just not being able to earn the 15 bucks an hour that they were before and know that with that reduction of two bucks an hour they're going to end up having about a \$4,000 shortfall each and every year.

That is something that those individuals will never forget. Over the next three and a half years many of those individuals, of course, will become of voting age, and they'll be passing onto others in the

high schools that they go to their experiences. This government will soon learn that if you basically try to place the burden of economic recovery on the backs of people who have little to spare, those individuals don't forget it. But far be it from me to tell the government to stop what they're doing. I mean, if they continue down this path, they will alienate a large section of the Alberta population, and it'll be politically beneficial for us.

But the carnage that happens as a result is not something that I want to see. You know, I'd far rather have the government put a halt to this plunge backwards into the depths of labour legislation that we should have long since parted from and adopt an attitude of really looking forward to the future because that's what our young people deserve. I mean, they don't deserve to have the negative, defeatist attitude that this government is inculcating. They're being told: "The only way to infuse an economy is to give the wealthy even more money, and they'll invest it to your benefit. But you, young man, young lady, who are 16, 17 years of age: we're going to cut your wages by two bucks an hour and cost you 4,000 bucks, and you're going to contribute that to the Alberta bottom line."

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone would like to make a brief question or comment. I see that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View would like to do just that.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very interested in what the hon. member was saying. I always enjoy his comments, particularly on this sort of legislation, and I thought perhaps he might like to continue with those comments.

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

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for her gracious request for me to continue talking about the values that we have on this side of the House and how we think that they should be reflected in the government's treatment of its most vulnerable citizens, including those who would be earning minimum wage, whether they be students or not.

I'm not sure what's next. What is the next step for this government? They stepped back from the precipice of actually rolling back the minimum wage for everybody, and they just made it youth workers', which they thought maybe would be less politically painful for them to do. I really wonder with this government: what's next that they think they might be able to get away with? Is the next step going to be rolling back the minimum wage for everybody? I wouldn't put it past them. I'm sure they considered it, and they walked themselves back from that precipice, but I think that that's something that they probably would like to do if they thought they could potentially get away with it.

*12:50 a.m.*

But the pain that they're causing just with the youth minimum wage is something that they will find is going to be thrown back at them when those youth are finally voters in a couple of years. I know that I have many of those young people in my constituency in high school right now. I've talked to them, and it has had an effect of motivating those individuals to be much more politically active than they otherwise might have been.

It's a healthy sign, to see young people fight back and decide that what they see in their government isn't acceptable and to – you can't have a more effective social studies course in political activism than to have 16- and 17-year-old high school students have their wages cut by two bucks an hour. That motivates a lot of young

people to learn a lot more than they otherwise might about social studies and political activism and the fact that government matters. When that government is telling them, “Don’t worry; it’s good for you; it’ll be good for the Alberta economy; thank you for that \$4,000 investment,” those individuals are going to say: “Yeah. You know what? It really does matter who governs us. Honesty matters, and the intentional misuse of numbers matters. Who governs me matters. Whether I get involved in political activism matters. Goodness gracious, going to a protest matters. Going to the steps of the Legislature matters. Getting my friends together to talk about what we can do about this matters.”

It’s really helpful from a motivating standpoint to show these young people just what they can do to let their government know that they don’t appreciate being treated as second-class citizens or as collateral damage in this government’s race to try to balance the budget, to create a climate, quote, unquote, that will be conducive to investors, where they are the ones, the young people, who are getting this wage cut, exploited to create this climate that investors apparently will thrive in.

I won’t go into detail about so many of the very insidious changes to labour legislation that this bill, this pick-your-pockets bill, has proposed to encumber our population with. But just as far as the overall sentiment or the feeling of it, it is something that I don’t feel is going to do anything positive for the population in the province. There’s a total lack of vision. I mean, we hear from the other side so often – they talk about this Alberta spirit, the Alberta advantage, the entrepreneurial spirit – but it’s just so desultory, the underlying malaise that you get from talking . . .

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

**Member Ceci:** I’ll join in the debate.

**The Speaker:** Well, this sounds wonderful. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the call.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to join in the debate on Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. I think, more accurately, we’ve been using the term Bill to Pick the Pockets of Albertans. I would like to begin by complimenting some of my colleagues here, from Calgary-Mountain View, from Edmonton-McClung, just on some of the things they’ve been talking about. Like, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View talked about income inequality, and the reason that she ran in the first place was to make life in society more equal for people, not the same for everybody, but to ensure that those with the least have the opportunity to get ahead. I think that’s a great virtue to have for running for office, and I commend her for it.

When I think about the work my colleague from Edmonton-McClung has done, he too has brought forward a number of issues that are important for him. I want to tell him that I’ve never worked in a restaurant – everybody here has worked at a restaurant, it seems, except me – but I, of course, want to support people who work in lower wage positions. That’s why I got into the profession I did, early on, as a young social worker and tried to assist. I know there are many around this House who kind of travelled that same journey.

You know, I look at this bill, the pick-your-pockets bill, and I think about it, and I think about other bills that have been brought forward by this government. The bad-faith bargaining bill is having reverberations right now in Calgary, with I think over 700 people out, an information picket in front of Foothills hospital, protesting the actions of this government in terms of ripping up contracts with

people. I think there’s lots to look at in terms of the issues that are going on here with regard to the bills that have been brought forward. The hon. Leader of the Opposition talked about Bill 7, a bill to do nothing. We’ve got many, many bills that we believe will be problematic for Albertans for many years in the future.

As we tried to modernize the labour standards and employment standards in this province . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I understand that a shift change may be taking place. However, I encourage you to keep your conversations to yourself, or there are lounges available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the floor, and I’d love to hear him.

**Member Ceci:** I appreciate it, all.

With regard to the Picking the Pockets of Workers in This Province Bill, the legislation introduces a number of problems, including cutting banked overtime, slashes to holiday pay, rollbacks to youth wages. The Leader of the Opposition and the critic for the area from Edmonton-Whitemud have all talked about the problems with all of those areas.

We on this side want to continue to support progressive legislation around labour legislation instead of things like paying out overtime hours at straight time instead of time and a half. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, that will affect 400,000 workers in this province and affect people in the oil and gas sector the hardest in this province. Of course, we’ve talked about looking at: over a 10-week period it would be \$2,600 that that worker would lose. We don’t think that’s a positive thing going forward for workers. As the colleague for Edmonton-McClung and others have said on this side, you know, every dollar that a worker, especially a low-wage worker, gets goes back into the economy, helps the economy out in terms of cycling in the economy, which is far better than putting it into the pockets of shareholders and going to the States or foreign countries, as we’ll do with the outcome of a bill like this.

We don’t see where this bill will create jobs. In fact, the government seems to be affecting jobs in this province negatively already. The colleague from Calgary-McCall has identified many places, many companies who have laid off workers already as a result of the efforts of the government and will continue to perhaps go down a negative vein as a result of the work of this government, which is not what we want.

We know that when Albertans bank their overtime hours and take some paid time off with their families, they shouldn’t end up with less money in their pocket, Mr. Speaker, and in their bank accounts, but that’s what will happen with this bill.

We heard, too, from the Leader of the Opposition earlier tonight that the Premier did not talk about this specific action during the election. In fact, what he said was totally opposite to what is now taking place. The Premier claimed that this move would not diminish overtime pay, but under Alberta law paid time off for banked overtime is considered wages and must be paid at time and a half.

*1:00 a.m.*

We know now that we’re getting behind the eight ball with respect to where Alberta will be. We will be behind about four or five other provinces, and all of them will be ahead of us. The provinces of B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, P.E.I., Newfoundland and Labrador, and the territories all require overtime to be banked at time and a half. I can’t see where that’s progressive, Mr. Speaker, with regard to the actions. We know that, as the critic for this area has said, Albertans work hard, and they deserve to earn the same overtime pay as other Canadians do. Why

does the Premier believe that Albertans deserve less? It doesn't make sense to me.

We believe that banked overtime isn't the only change that's going to hurt workers in this province. The UCP is proposing to implement a \$2-per-hour wage cut to students between 13 and 17, and we heard a significant amount of that from, again, my colleague from Edmonton-McClung. We oppose those kinds of changes strongly, Mr. Speaker, because we believe that workers deserve equal pay regardless of their age or educational status. As has been said by the critic for this area, again, the value of your work should depend on the effort and skill that you put into it, not the year you were born.

Mr. Speaker, I was born many years ago, but I can tell you that I have never worked for a youth wage in Canada. It's been a long time since I've been a youth. Growing up in Ontario, that wasn't there. You were paid the same minimum wage as everybody else, and I don't see why Alberta would want to change and go back to a time when wage and age discrimination took place. It's going to make it harder for teenagers who are often working to save up for their first possessions, like a car, or to pay for college, and vulnerable teenagers may take the opportunity to be less than honest about their situation so that they can earn a higher wage. That's concerning.

I'm not really wild about the changes that'll happen around the holiday pay as well, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're not supporting this legislation as it is written. We had prepared a suite of amendments, but regrettably I don't think any of them passed. On this bill not one of them has passed. So for that and other reasons I'm not going to support the pick-your-pockets bill, and I would say that, you know, we're going to continue to stand up for workers on this side. We believe that hard-working Albertans deserve what we're putting forward, and we want to make sure that modern workplace laws respect working people, and that's not what's happening here.

As I've said, the Foothills hospital information picket, with, they say, 700 hospital workers out in front, is an example of some of the pain that's being caused by this government with regard to their actions. When we were in government, Mr. Speaker, we made progress on joint governance of pensions. We heavily invested in a capital plan that kept people working in this province, and those are the things that build your economy.

I would just say, Mr. Speaker, that I wish to adjourn debate on this item.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### **Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

#### **Bill 13 Alberta Senate Election Act (continued)**

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

**Ms Hoffman:** Glenora. Glenmore is lovely, too, in Calgary.

**The Deputy Chair:** It is. Time check: 1 in the morning.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and colleagues, for the stimulating debate thus far. I'm sure it will be an

exciting evening/morning in discussion. I want to reinforce a few of the things that our leader said with regard to Bill 13 yesterday. It certainly was something that I think dates back a number of decades to this being brought forward by this government. I know I've heard some people talk about Preston Manning and the Reform days, and I appreciate what they've had to say about that.

I also want to say that I think the fact that the Senate exists in its current form is the biggest issue, not how people become part of the Senate. For example, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec both have 24 Senators; British Columbia, six; Alberta, six; Manitoba, six; Saskatchewan, six; Nova Scotia, 10; New Brunswick, 10; P.E.I., four; Newfoundland and Labrador, six; Northwest Territories, one; Yukon, one; Nunavut, one. That gives us a whopping six Senators out of 105, certainly not proportional to the population. That's approximately 5 per cent, and I think we've recently passed 10 per cent of the national population. This, I would say, is the biggest issue with the current structure of the Senate.

I think that talking about how we put those folks forward is fine and probably not the most important use of our time and consideration, but I think that if we wanted to do more about the Senate, we could push for radical reforms. That would be more where I'd like to see our efforts than on elections, which are very costly and won't actually change the structure or the purpose of the Senate either.

I have grave concerns that we are spending our time focused on something that is not the root cause or concern for most Albertans. I know that there were many, many things, in both of our platforms, that people raised with me on the doorsteps. I don't recall any conversations in any of the ridings I door-knocked in talking about Senate appointments and whether or not they should be elected, for this last provincial election anyway. Interesting that it took priority to become Bill 13 in the First Session, the first sitting, of this Legislature.

I want to say that in terms of how election financing works, too, I think that there are some concerns about that. Do we want to take those same concerns and move them to yet another expensive form of election? I'd say not. I don't think that outside groups should have the ability to impact outcomes for Albertans through our democratic elections. I think that we've seen from the party in government time and time again that they're often beholden to special-interest groups and rich donors. For example, here we are in the very first sitting of this government, and the first thing they did was cut a substantial stream of revenue, and the third thing they did was cut another substantial stream of revenue. Why did they do that? Well, it appears that that \$4.5 billion giveaway to already profitable corporations – again, large corporations, not small businesses as defined through our own tax laws: a \$4.5 billion giveaway.

*1:10 a.m.*

If we adopted the same election policies around the appointment of Senators, I don't think that that would do anything to change the numbers of folks that we have in the Senate; that's for sure. We'd still only have about 5 per cent of the Senators even though we have 10 per cent of the population. I think it would create more opportunities for more folks to be beholden to wealthy donors who don't necessarily have the same interests as the ordinary folks that we are all here to represent.

I can't help but think about all the changes that have been done for corporations and how it couldn't have been done quickly enough, but when it comes to bringing forward an education budget or a health care budget, we're told that we need to wait well into the fall. Well, that doesn't seem to make sense when kids will be returning to school on September 1. In making those decisions on

how to underfund their education, you know, even if they're unpopular decisions, which, I imagine, many, many decisions will be, at least be straight with the folks who are entrusted to educate our children and make sure that we have the resources in place or not in place so that they can at least plan accordingly. Right now they're going on their best guess, and that certainly isn't fair. For seven weeks we've been in this place, and we've been asking for accountability on that, and we have yet to receive any.

What Bill 13 does is that it establishes that Senate elections will be held in Alberta to elect a nominee. Again, that doesn't mean you're electing a Senator. You're electing a nominee, who may be brought forward for consideration by the federal government of the day. Elections can take place as a stand-alone election. Well, that certainly doesn't seem very financially efficient or, like, a good way to engage voters. I can tell you that when we have municipal elections, the fact that people vote for a mayor, a councillor, or a reeve, I guess, a council member, as well as the opportunity for school board representatives certainly makes it more likely that people will vote for all three than if they had to go on three separate occasions to vote for individual positions.

Having stand-alone elections doesn't seem effective. They're already, I would argue, not a great use of resources for donors and potentially for the public to be investing in Senate elections. Well, definitely the public because somebody has to run the elections themselves. Then, of course, they could also be held at the same time as other elections. But the fact that they could be independent or at the same time as a referendum, too, brings forward other questions for me, Mr. Chair.

To be a candidate on the ballot, you must be aligned with a federal party or run as an independent. Again, doesn't that just create even more opportunities for undue influence over folks who should be appointed, I would say, to act in the best interests of all the folks that live in that jurisdiction that they're there to represent? The federal affiliation would be displayed on the ballot. Well, I guess that makes sense if you agree with the election at all, in the first place, and the fact that they're parties, in the second place. And then candidates can be endorsed by provincial parties, which, of course, don't necessarily align with federal parties. I would say that that is becoming ever so often the case across Canada.

The provincial party will be allowed to spend \$100,000 per candidate during the campaign period. Well, that's interesting. They're supposed to be federal candidates or independents, so why would provincial parties be investing money? When we receive donations for provincial candidates, of course, it comes with a provincial tax receipt. So again we're taking taxpayer money out of service for things like health care and education and roads and safety in our communities and moving that money over towards having very costly elections for positions where we certainly don't have our fair representation, at least in seats and in a number of other areas as well.

As well, candidates could spend \$500,000 on their campaign. Youch. That certainly is a lot more than the campaign spending limit that we've set for provincial elections or now municipal elections. I think that the spending limits we have are fair and reasonable and give people an opportunity to have their message heard without undue influence by anyone who is able to access deeper pockets.

They can also spend \$100,000 on their nomination. Wow. Again, that is significant, and that is exactly the amount that a provincial party would be allowed to spend as well. That sure seems intense.

Then, of course, there's also a component for third-party advertisers, which I understand. Freedom of speech. Third parties need to have the ability to weigh in on matters that they have

consideration for. They would be allowed to each spend \$30,000, any third-party PAC.

It wouldn't be unreasonable for us to see an individual candidate's total expenses be about a million dollars, a million dollars to run to be seen as the nominee for a position that still the federal government gets to determine who's appointed. It doesn't matter who's been nominated, and at the end of the day Alberta doesn't have the kind of numbers that I think today in a contemporary Canada – perhaps 152 years ago the numbers made sense. Perhaps 152 years ago the west having such small numbers and particularly the numbers for Alberta, specifically, made sense.

What I don't think makes sense is that we are talking about spending so much on electing a nominee that may or may not get appointed, that these elections would be held at a time that doesn't necessarily entice good voter participation levels, and that at the end of the day I think we have deeper concerns with the Senate than how individuals get chosen to serve on it. Those are the main points I wanted to make.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton City-Centre has risen to make a comment.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you, and good morning, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to return to the House and have the opportunity to speak to Bill 13, the Alberta Senate Election Act. It's a bill in which I have a number of thoughts. This is a bill, I guess, that's very much in line with what appears to be the philosophy of this government in many respects, reflecting what this Premier seems to like to engage in, that being very grand and showy gestures that have a lot to say about his own political style but are more or less lacking in significant substance, at least in terms of what they are actually intended to achieve. That is a theme, indeed, I think we've seen with this government in many respects, that it likes to introduce bills that suggest a particular intent but really seem to have quite another effect.

What we have with this bill is, according to this government, a bill that is returning us to a system that we had previously, that was instituted by a previous Conservative government in this province, by which we would hold elections for candidates that then potentially could be appointed to the Senate. As my colleagues have noted, of course, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. Indeed, there have been a limited number of individuals that have gone through the selection process in the province of Alberta who have in fact then been appointed to the Senate. That was even when we had governments that were aligned, Conservative governments in Alberta and a Conservative Prime Minister, a Prime Minister in whose government the Premier sat and who was at least initially in his term apparently very dedicated to Senate reform although eventually they ran into the constitutional realities and did absolutely nothing to improve or change the operation of the Senate or to fulfill any of their campaign promises on that front. As I noted, this Premier was a member of the government, a senior member.

We had this process in Alberta, and indeed it was something that we allowed to lapse during our time as government because, again, it was a very grand gesture that ultimately had little or no value, in my personal view and in the view of many of my constituents with whom I have spoken. However, this government, again, seems to want to bring that back. Despite their statement that that is what they are doing, as my colleagues have noted and as I'm going to speak about now, there is much, much more in this bill than what

once existed in previous legislation in and around this particular issue.

**1:20 a.m.**

Now, of course, it's not surprising that this is the direction this government is choosing to go. We're seeing them do this on a number of fronts, in which they want to spend taxpayer money to make grand political gestures, to essentially advertise for their own political policy. We're seeing this as they prepare to spend \$30 million on their war room to do work that oil and gas companies, frankly, have the ability to do themselves, have been doing themselves, and should take the responsibility of doing themselves. However, our government wants to spend \$30 million of tax money on them. That's their choice.

We see the court challenges that they want to mount against federal carbon policy. We've seen how successful that's been for other jurisdictions, which is not at all. But this government, again, wants to choose to spend taxpayer money on their own political grandstanding. What we have here in this bill strikes me as being much of the same.

As my colleagues have noted, what we have in this bill is a blurring of jurisdictions. Currently, if we were having a provincial election, provincial political parties are the ones who are spending on provincial political candidates, who are speaking to provincial issues. As clearly delineated, we do not have the federal Conservative Party coming and spending on an Alberta provincial election to support Alberta provincial candidates. When we have a municipal election, we do not have provincial political parties spending and getting involved in advertising on behalf of provincial candidates. [interjections]

I hear some heckling from the members across the way. Perhaps they can rise and speak to that later on if they feel that they have an opinion that's worth putting on the record.

**An Hon. Member:** I actually did.

**Mr. Shepherd:** I would invite you to do that, Member for Calgary-West.

The fact is, Mr. Chair, that what we have here is a government attempt to bring in legislation so that they can continue to politically advertise during other levels of government. They want to blur political lines. They want to involve larger and larger amounts of political money from partisan sources to continue their broad political campaigns during elections that have nothing to do with the levels of government that they want to get involved in this.

Now, as my colleagues have noted, we're talking about a large sum of money here, \$500,000 for a senatorial campaign, far, far more than any other level of government is currently permitted to spend in this province for a campaign. There is no reason for that, Mr. Chair. It is not something that existed in the previous legislation. It is something brand new that they are attempting, as they have done with so many of their pieces of legislation, to slip in through the back door. Again, they did not mention this in their campaign platform, yet another one of those items that they had chosen to hide from Albertans.

This is in line with the practice and the behaviour of this Premier, the use of dollars from one level of government to campaign for another. We saw this Premier, when he was sitting as a member, an MP in Ottawa, campaigning while on the federal payroll for his position as a leader of a provincial political party here in Alberta. That was his first entrance onto the political field here. Now, after he became the leader of first the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, then the United Conservative Party of Alberta, and now sits as the Premier, he is making use of his paid position here to

campaign for his future position as Prime Minister, or so his aspirations are. Indeed, some would suggest that he is making use of his current position to campaign for the current Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, as he gallivants about the country on the taxpayer dime, crusading.

I would suggest that perhaps he's not even necessarily after that particular end. He's perhaps waiting for the opportunity to take that position for himself and make use of taxpayer dollars from Alberta to support his work in that. So it makes sense that they would want to further that work by now introducing extreme amounts of spending for senatorial campaigns on a purely partisan basis within the province of Alberta.

Now, I'm hearing a good deal of commentary from government members, so I assume that perhaps we'll see some robust debate on this front, and perhaps they'll have something to say on the record.

But what I will say is that I think it is quite clear to anyone who sits down and takes a look at this bill that this is not about a simple question of democracy in the way that this government would like to frame it. This is about bringing huge amounts of more spending into the political process here in the province of Alberta.

Now, we have seen in the last round of municipal elections – indeed, we saw a massive mobilization amongst some conservative groups to attempt to remove municipal politicians that they felt were running against their interests. We saw this Premier speaking in favour of a slate of candidates for the Calgary board of education. So we're already seeing this blurring of partisan lines. We're already seeing that they are looking for every opportunity to increase spending and influence in all levels of government, and through this bill it's clear that it's their intent to simply continue to expand that.

I am concerned about the effect this could have within the province of Alberta. Setting aside the fact that, again, this is generally just a grand and empty gesture, which is fine – sometimes it is worth making a symbolic gesture. Sometimes it is worth, I guess, knowing that you are not necessarily going to have an impact but still feeling the need to stand up and make a particular statement. But when it comes to spending millions of dollars of taxpayer money to make that grand and empty gesture, that is where I begin to question whether that is the best priority, whether that is the best place to be placing a limited investment given that we are currently awaiting the report from a panel whose sole job is to figure out where we can cut spending in the province of Alberta. Yet we want to increase a taxpayer subsidy for a process which ultimately has no influence, a process which is intended, quite clearly, simply to continue to increase partisan presence within processes that have generally been nonpartisan to this point.

Speaking to that in particular, the involvement of this with municipal elections – you know, my colleague from Edmonton-Manning spoke to this earlier today. Indeed, I find that troublesome, that in the midst of a municipal election, when taxpayers and when residents of our cities, townships, counties already have so much information to process, already are considering issues of such great import, into that process we are going to inject yet another level of partisan politics, which does not belong there, another layer of confusion, an insane level of spending.

No mayor would be spending this much to get elected. No city councillor or reeve. Well, perhaps a mayor.

**Ms Hoffman:** They used to.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Okay. I will take that back.

**Ms Hoffman:** I think they brought in caps.

**Mr. Shepherd:** But, I mean, we have at least capped that spending, right? There are limits. But on this process for some reason this government feels that this should be without limit, that we should simply be throwing money around. Third-party advertising: \$30,000 on a senatorial candidate, Mr. Chair. Thirty thousand dollars per third-party advertiser.

**1:30 a.m.**

If this government simply wanted to restore what they consider to be a democratic process, if they simply wanted to bring back a sign of what they believe is a symbol of how they believe the Senate should work, they could have done that. They simply could have reintroduced the legislation which we had. That would have been a simple thing. Or if they, as they say, liked the changes that we brought in so much around disclosure and financing, they could have applied similar limits rather than the extremely large ones which they are putting in place instead. But they are not.

My only conclusion is that they are looking for more opportunities, more methods through the back door to involve money in the political process, money which, frankly, does not need to be here, is not needed to accomplish the goal that they claim they have, money that is not involved in any other jurisdiction in Canada, which is something we've talked about quite a bit. Again, I'm quite happy when Alberta is exceptional for positive things, but this government seems intent on making us exceptional on so many regressive ideas.

With that in mind, I believe that one of my colleagues has some thoughts on this in regard to how this may apply and the effects it may have for indigenous communities in the province of Alberta, and I'm looking forward to hearing his thoughts on that. So perhaps at this time, having made my own thoughts clear, I will take my seat and give him the opportunity to offer his thoughts.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

Do I see any other members wishing – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, I'm not the speaker who will be providing those comments, but I do want to just put myself on the record here. I don't plan to speak too long because I think that the members in opposition here have summed up my concerns with this Bill 13 quite well. But I do just want to, once again, put my name on the record saying that I do not support this legislation.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Of course, one of my main concerns is the prevalence of third-party advertising money that has been coming into our province over the last few number of years. We're seeing it from organizations like Rebel media, even Facebook campaigns and social media campaigns like Alberta Proud or Ontario Proud, depending on the province that you live in. I have very big concerns about that because the money that is going to those campaigns is largely unaccountable and unaccounted for, much like the leadership contest of the Conservatives that we saw, which elected this Premier as their leader. Of course, there was a conversation within there that he would be forthcoming with the details of who donated to him. Unfortunately, we never saw those details, so after him becoming the Premier, we're still in a position where we don't truly understand who he is beholden to when we talk about how he got to where he is now. [interjection] Unfortunately, it sounds like the members across the way have concerns with my comments. They can also stand up and share their concerns. It might also just be getting kind of loud because they have earplugs in and they can't

necessarily hear each other even though they're sitting next to each other, but that's neither here nor there.

I also have some concerns with, as the Member for Edmonton-City Centre brought up, the fact that this Premier, when in the federal government, tippytoed around this issue, around Senate reform. Of course, as was mentioned, they maybe sat around the table and discussed the prospects of changing the Senate and realized that it's actually quite a hard process to undergo, and they decided not to do that. So, of course, you know, he comes and becomes the Premier of the province, and all of a sudden he has ideas about Senate reform. Well, it would have been a good idea to bring those forward when he was a federal minister under the Stephen Harper government. That's also a very big concern.

Of course, this is once again very symbolic, it seems, of the bigger picture of this government, you know, willing to take action when they're not actually able to take action. You know, I personally do believe that we need Senate reform; unfortunately, Bill 13 does not address the real concerns that I have with the Senate. Really, it's just blowing loopholes into elections financing, and our government over the last four years worked very hard to strengthen the democracy of our province and strengthen the voice of Albertans and not as much unaccounted for, third-party advertisers. Of course, in the election we saw slanderous accusations on billboards across this province. Some of them got a slap on the wrist by Elections Alberta, and unfortunately others didn't have the proper action taken against them, in my opinion. But here we are, and we have a government that's willing to continue weakening democracy in our province. I have great concerns with that.

With that being said, I will not be supporting Bill 13. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I welcome the opportunity to speak to this bill for a few moments, and then I do have an amendment I will be bringing forward. I just thought I'd make a few preliminary comments about the bill because it's always interesting to go back in time and to relitigate a conversation that happened 20 years ago in this province. It brings me back to the old television shows I used to watch, going back in time. I couldn't quite decide whether the bill was more reflective of the comedy *It's About Time*, where spacemen went back to the caveman era, or *The Time Tunnel*, which was a more fascinating, science-based show in which the time travel was all in error because the science didn't work. They hadn't thought it through before they did it. In either case, I think, reflective of the bill before us.

I think there are a couple of issues with the bill. I mean, of course, they've all been pointed out repeatedly by this side of the House to deaf ears. I think I'll take just a moment to reflect on some of that. The major point is that it's quite clear that we know that there is no ability for the province of Alberta to actually elect someone to the Senate. You know, it's simply a dog whistle to members of the community. This is yet another bill that is shallow and unthought out, unthought through by the government. We've seen repeatedly over this session – perhaps not because they don't know that they're shallow, because they are. They might be quite aware of that, but choosing to do it anyways because somehow they'll win some kind of a victory with their base, particularly the extreme base they have that wishes to find some way to cut us off from the rest of Canada.

I think that one of the things that's particularly a concern in this particular bill is the fact that there actually is no plan that goes with it if we actually had an elected Senate. If that's the ultimate goal

and that's the direction we're going, there's no plan to actually describe what the nature of government would be. It's obviously some kind of a thin borrowing of an American-style, two-House constitutional body, but they don't have any plan for how that would work. As a result, they have absolutely no plan for how they would deal with the constitutional gridlock that would result if we had two separate elected bodies who differ on various bills before them.

You know, I think again I'm finding myself saying: I wish they'd just taken the time and actually thought this through before they brought it forward. But we know what they're doing is that they're really bringing it forward so they can ignore it for the rest of the term, being able to go back to their base and say: it was in our platform, so we did it. I understand that, but we know as well that because this province has absolutely no ability whatsoever to actually elect someone to the Senate, what they're trying to do is that they're trying to do it by stealth.

I think that's very interesting because that question has actually already been tested in the Supreme Court of Canada in a reference case that was brought forward by the Harper government, of which our Premier was a member. The Supreme Court made it absolutely clear that you cannot change the Constitution by stealth. The question has been asked, the question has been answered by the highest court in the land, and this government has just chosen to ignore it completely. So I guess we waste taxpayers' money so that the boys can play with themselves.

1:40 a.m.

**Mr. McIver:** Pardon me. Really?

**Mr. Feehan:** Yeah. Really.

I would like to move this conversation a little to an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies for this amendment, and I will pass them along before we get started. Thank you.

**The Chair:** This will be known as amendment A4.

Hon. member, please proceed.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to read the contents of the amendment while it's being passed out and then get an opportunity to speak to it. While some of my earlier comments were obviously frivolous, I'm quite serious about the nature of this amendment. I'm hoping that the government will actually take a moment to listen to this amendment because it's a fairly quick, simple one and one that I think will actually lead to a better relationship with the indigenous community if they choose to do it.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, just to clarify, you're moving this on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview?

**Mr. Feehan:** Ah. Yes, I am.

**The Chair:** For *Hansard's* sake. Thank you.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I move that Bill 13, the Alberta Senate Election Act, be amended in section 38 by adding the following after subsection (5):

(5.1) The Minister responsible for the Local Authorities Election Act shall enter into an agreement under subsection (5) if requested to do so by an elected authority, band council of an Indian band, advisory committee or council to which subsection (5) applies.

The simple intent here is to ensure that First Nations in the province of Alberta are able to participate in this election.

Now, I've already said that I don't agree with the nature of having these faux elections for the Senate. However, I understand the nature of our democracy, and I understand that we are outnumbered and that this bill will pass because the government chooses to do so regardless of the Supreme Court decisions on this matter. So given that I realize that it is going to pass, I'm asking this government to consider a small change to this bill, just simply to ensure that if, indeed, you are going to go ahead with this and you are going to have Senate elections . . .

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Hon. Minister of Transportation, a point of order?

**Mr. McIver:** Yeah. The hon. member just said a couple of times that the bill is going to pass. I think it's against parliamentary good practice to presume the outcome of something that's before the Legislative Assembly. The hon. member ought to know that we don't know which way people are going to vote until they can vote. The hon. member is free to speculate, but to actually take the House for granted is definitely a point of order. I would request respectfully that you correct the hon. member and ask him to withdraw that remark.

**The Chair:** Hon. member?

**Mr. Feehan:** I will withdraw the remarks.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Please proceed.

**Mr. Feehan:** I think that the serious point here, the thing that we should be paying attention to is the fact that there is a danger in this act that First Nations will not have the facility to vote in a Senate election should one occur, and I think we need to correct that.

The problem lies in just a function of the structure of how this is set up. The reality is that First Nations are not allowed to vote in municipal elections because their reserves are considered Crown land, federal land, and they're not part of any municipality. As a result, if we tie the Senate election to a municipal election, as is suggested in this section of the act, then there will be no possibility for people who do not live in a municipality, ergo all of the First Nations who live on-reserve, to vote in a Senate election.

All I'm simply asking is that the government side take the moment to consider this and to make an effort to reach out to the indigenous community by ensuring that if a Senate election does occur, members of the First Nations can participate. We know that the First Nations are very concerned about their relationship with Canada at large and prefer a government-to-government relationship, with an emphasis, of course, on dealing with the senior Crown, the federal government. As the Senate is part of the senior Crown, it would give an opportunity for them to have direct input into the senior Crown, apparently. The government believes that to be true.

You know, I just ask the government to take the time to review this bill and, particularly, this amendment so that we can ensure that we are not by accident, through unintended consequences, excluding all the First Nations across the province of Alberta, at least those members that live on-reserve, which is somewhere over a hundred thousand people right now in the province of Alberta. I think that to systematically exclude a hundred thousand people from a vote that you wish to have is problematic. It is a serious

amendment I'm bringing forward and one that I will be discussing in my conversations with the First Nations as we move forward.

We all know, just from looking at the record of the First Nations votes in the province of Alberta, that there has been a significant increase in interest amongst First Nations in voting in non First Nations elections and that that's a change, and I think it's one we want to support and encourage because for so long members of the First Nations felt extremely disenfranchised in this province. The fact that they are willing to come and give voice to their concerns within elections, which they often do not view as their own elections: I think that we should open the door and at least give them a choice.

If they look at it and they decide, "This is not our election; we are not interested, and we wish not to participate," as so many people in my own party, for example, did in the last Senate election – I remember myself going in to vote in an election and being offered a second ballot which included the Senate nominees and officially declining that ballot, as many other NDP people did, because we didn't want to participate in a farce. We can't stop it, but we certainly don't feel that we want to be contributors. However, I don't think my choice should govern other people's choices, and I think that in this case I would just like to – despite the fact that I would never use it. I can't as I'm not indigenous, but I would not use it even if it were given to me. I would still like to offer that to the First Nations in this province because I think that's a sign of respect.

You know, we say that we would like people to participate and that we'd like to hear their voices and that we encourage their participation. I don't think we should immediately, then, introduce an act which undermines that participation. It just seems contradictory, to use slightly polite language here at this particular time.

1:50 a.m.

I'll leave my comments at that for this evening, but I welcome any other people speaking to this amendment if they choose to do so. If people have concerns about whether or not the First Nations community is concerned about this, I'd be happy to do some work to connect members of the government with the First Nations community so that they can address this issue.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time.

**The Chair:** Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:51 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

|         |          |          |
|---------|----------|----------|
| Carson  | Irwin    | Sabir    |
| Feehan  | Phillips | Shepherd |
| Hoffman |          |          |

Against the motion:

|                    |        |            |
|--------------------|--------|------------|
| Aheer              | Jones  | Rosin      |
| Allard             | Loewen | Rowswell   |
| Amery              | Lovely | Rutherford |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Luan   | Schow      |
| Getson             | Madu   | Singh      |
| Glasgo             | McIver | Smith      |

|         |         |              |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Hanson  | Neudorf | Toor         |
| Horner  | Orr     | Walker       |
| Hunter  | Rehn    | Yao          |
| Totals: | For – 7 | Against – 27 |

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

**The Chair:** We are back on the main bill. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill?

If not, shall I call the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Any opposed? Carried.

### Bill 8

#### Education Amendment Act, 2019

**The Chair:** We are on the main bill. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be moving an amendment to this piece of legislation, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. I have the requisite number of copies of the amendment. Do you want me to wait, or do you want me to read?

**The Chair:** This will be amendment A2.

Hon. member, please proceed.

2:10 a.m.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Member for Calgary-McCall to move that Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be amended by striking out section 15 and substituting the following:  
15 Section 59 is amended

(a) by repealing subsection (1) and substituting the following:

Transportation

59(1) A board must provide for transportation of a student to and from the site of the school in which the school has enrolled the student if the student resides within the boundaries of the school division.

(b) by repealing subsections (3), (4) and (5).

Madam Chair, it's an important amendment, and it's important to many families, many parents and students in my own riding and in northeast Calgary in general. It relates to transportation, that I believe is squarely an issue of access to education. Having transportation makes sure that students can get to and from the schools. In 2017-18 certain changes were made by the CBE, the Calgary board of education, to transportation. They discontinued the yellow bus service for students going to many schools, in particular schools other than their designated schools such as the traditional learning academy, FFCA charter school, and the like. Currently the act provides, the current regulations provide that if you're living 2.4 kilometres from your home to your designated school, you will be provided transportation. But that's not the case if you're going to a different school or traditional learning centres, TLC schools, or a school of your choice.

When those changes were made by the CBE, essentially many members of the opposition – then the UCP, the Alberta Party – were actively organizing around this issue, around myself and the government, on how the changes we made through Bill 1 had created this issue, which was not the case. That was absolutely not true because Bill 1 was reducing fees, transportation fees and other instructional fees, and gave almost \$54 million in savings to the parents.

After that I spoke to many parents – many families attended town hall meetings on the same issue – and committed to them that I will be working on this issue with my colleagues. I think it was a huge concern. When I will be out and about in the constituency, parents will approach me and talk about how difficult those changes are on their families. In fact, when I will get home, because my own nephew was also impacted by this change, I will get to hear more at home as well from my sister and brother-in-law.

**Ms Hoffman:** And nephew.

**Mr. Sabir:** And nephew as well.

I worked with the Minister of Education then, now the MLA for Edmonton-North West, and we decided to have a look at transportation in the education system as a whole. We started consulting with the stakeholders, and we also came up with a survey to assess the transportation needs and to see what Albertans want from their government. Clearly, at that point what we heard was that Albertans want to make sure that transportation is available as a right to all students and not just for their designated school. Other schools are also publicly funded schools, and I think what they were saying was that those are also Alberta students. They also deserve to have access to their school like any other student. What we had discussed, back when we were in government, was that we were trying to fix this for every student and make sure that if you're registered in a school division, for instance the CBE – it doesn't matter which school you go to – you should get transportation to and from your school as a right.

Now you are in charge. This government is in charge. Now they have this opportunity to fix that, which they were advocating back then, when they were in opposition, and which they were organizing on about this transportation. Now this amendment will make sure that we have this in legislation, that transportation to and from the school is a student right and that if they live within the boundaries of a school district, the school district will be responsible. The school division will be responsible for providing that transportation.

I ask all members of this House to take this amendment seriously and vote in favour. In particular, I think my colleagues from Calgary-Falconridge, Calgary-Cross, Calgary-North East, Calgary-North West, Calgary-North will be familiar with this issue. It was a huge, huge issue in those areas. I think that Albertans elected us to represent them and their interests. Certainly, if I'm here at 2:15 this morning, I'm here to defend my constituents. I am here to stand up for the issues they're facing, and I'm here to stand up for the students and the families, to make sure that they have access to education through transportation. This amendment will do exactly that. It will make sure that students who are registered in the school district, for instance the CBE, kids who are in northeast Calgary – it doesn't matter if they are going to TLC, or if they are going to FFCA. This amendment will make sure that the responsibility to provide transportation rests with the school division and that the government is supporting every student and their access to education.

Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and once more I urge all my colleagues, on both sides of the House, to support this amendment. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. As the Education critic and colleague of the Member for Calgary-McCall I want to thank him for this very thoughtful amendment. I know that many parents, particularly on Calgary's north side but parents all across Alberta, would find him to be somebody who is a champion, clearly, for their children and for their access to education.

I am going to say that choice without access is no choice at all. I think that what the member is putting forward through this amendment is very fair and reasonable. He's saying that if a school board allows you to live in that district and to enrol in a school, a school of your choice within that district, they should help you get to that school. I think that's a pretty simple rationale. He doesn't say that it must be provided for free. He doesn't say that it must be a certain drive-time limit or things like that. He just says that if you're living in a school district and you're allowed to enrol in a school in that district, the district should help you get there. I think that that's fair and reasonable, and I think that expecting the government to support transportation costs would also be fair and reasonable.

I can't help but think about, again, the leadership race that's happening south of the border for the Democratic nominee and the story of Kamala Harris, when she talked about her time growing up in L.A. at the time when desegregation was a concept that had begun to be embarked on. She was only in the second class of kids to be bused from her home community to another school. The reason why her family wanted her there was because they wanted her to have an excellent education. I think that that's the reason why any parent chooses a school for their child: they want them to have that opportunity to have an excellent education. With that come a number of sacrifices, but if it isn't feasible for that child to take – I think it was Johanzaib who had to take how many buses, hon. member?

**Mr. Sabir:** I don't know exactly, but it was more than one.

2:20 a.m.

**Ms Hoffman:** Too many buses, more than one bus. A teenager had to transfer buses to get to the school that he had been previously provided transportation to. And city bus transportation rather than yellow bus transportation, I imagine, caused a great amount of undue stress for his parents.

When you look at concepts like Kamala raised in the debate around desegregation, making sure that kids can get from one neighbourhood to another neighbourhood is fundamental to making sure that you have equality of access and equality of choice. I certainly am proud to support parental choice, but I think that with that come responsibilities for school districts and for the province to exercise some investment in making sure that that choice is a lived choice.

I think that if we fail to provide transportation to children who enrol in schools – of course, we're talking a lot about school choice, where there is a neighbourhood school and you're choosing another school, but without this amendment I worry about what, now having taken out the 2.4 from the act itself, it might say down the road, when we get back the report of the blue-ribbon panel: whether or not transportation should be provided at all, whether there should be government-invested transportation at all for youth. We might

be talking about Calgary, but this could very well be an issue that impacts rural constituencies in a significant way.

I can tell you that the school I grew up going to – the village had 300 people, the school had 300 students, so you can bet that the majority of those were bused in. Certainly, we didn't have 300 students living in town when we only had 300 people. That, I think, is one of the reasons why I'll be supporting this amendment.

The other piece I wanted to raise is that when I think back on my time with the Edmonton public school district, I have lots of points of pride, particularly the work we did around protecting vulnerable students. One area where I wish we would have done a little bit more – and I think this would help do that work here on an even larger, macro scale – is around ensuring transportation for students who wanted to study in another language, particularly in the second official language of our country, but I think any other language would be an ultimate goal. It's great that many districts have choice programs in a variety of languages, but again the question is: choice for whom? If it's a public institution and we allow students to enrol from across the residing jurisdiction, I think we should help them get there. This would be one of the ways that we would help provide that increased opportunity of choice for students choosing to study in French, particularly, as well as other opportunities as well.

I think those are the main points I want to raise on this. Again, I'd just say to the Member for Calgary-McCall that I wasn't the Minister of Education. I certainly heard his loud advocacy at every stage in deliberations around our table and appreciate all of the work that he did to support the message getting to our government, getting to the local school district as well and the advocacy that he's done, not just for the parents and the students in Calgary-McCall but all across northeastern Calgary and northern Calgary in general. I think this is something that was particularly loud in that part of the city, but I know it has impacted many Albertans and has the potential, through the passing of this amendment, to very positively impact many Albertans right across our province. Thank you to the member for his tenacious advocacy and for bringing this amendment forward for our consideration.

Here we are at 2:25. I think this is an important item, and I hope that members of the government, should they choose not to support this, would at least stand and tell us why. I think that this is fair and reasonable, and I think that if we don't want to support transportation, we should at least stand in this House and say why it is that we don't think kids should receive busing and why we think that we should leave it to parents to try to figure out how they're going to get children to school or even put them on a city bus, when they could be of a young age and it could take even longer than yellow bus services would require.

Those are some of the points that I'll leave with my colleagues for consideration, and thank you very much to the member for bringing forward this thoughtful amendment.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. member . . .

**Mr. Toor:** Madam Chair, I have a question for the member opposite.

**The Chair:** Sorry. Hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge, you want to speak to the bill?

**Mr. Toor:** Yeah. A question for the member.

**The Chair:** To the amendment?

**Mr. Toor:** I'm sorry. [interjection] Okay. I'll sit down.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you. I just have to say how disappointed I am that here we had the Member for Calgary-Falconridge on his feet wanting to speak to this important amendment. I imagine that if he hasn't heard parents already contact him – he probably has, particularly during the election. But I imagine that the parents and the students that live in his riding expect him to speak and vote on this matter. I would expect that it's probably a vote of conscience, whether or not we support children being transported to the schools that their parents choose. I would expect that it's something that we would allow free and thoughtful debate on in this House. I would expect free and thoughtful votes but at least free and thoughtful debate, Madam Chair. I certainly want to hear from the Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? No?

I'll call the question on amendment A2.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:26 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

|         |          |          |
|---------|----------|----------|
| Carson  | Irwin    | Sabir    |
| Feehan  | Phillips | Shepherd |
| Hoffman |          |          |

**2:30 a.m.**

Against the motion:

|                    |         |            |
|--------------------|---------|------------|
| Aheer              | Jones   | Rosin      |
| Allard             | Loewen  | Rowswell   |
| Amery              | Lovely  | Rutherford |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Luan    | Schow      |
| Dreeshen           | Madu    | Singh      |
| Getson             | McIver  | Smith      |
| Glasgo             | Neudorf | Toor       |
| Hanson             | Orr     | Walker     |
| Horner             | Rehn    | Yao        |
| Hunter             |         |            |

|         |         |              |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 7 | Against – 28 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

**The Chair:** We are back on the main bill. 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 welcome the opportunity to speak about Bill 8. Of course, I've had an opportunity at other times in the reading of this bill to speak about other aspects of the bill. Previously I've talked about my concerns about the bill increasing the number of charter schools, particularly attaching that to the ability of school boards to operate schools outside of their own jurisdiction, and the effect that I'm concerned that could potentially have on First Nations and other small communities around Alberta such that they will again be disenfranchised. I'm very concerned that this is a trend that this government has been continuing along. Having defeated my motion to ensure that First

Nations are adequately represented in Senate elections, we now find them again being disenfranchised in terms of their schools. It's a great concern to me that this government is choosing to repeatedly and continually ignore First Nations on matters of governance and clearly have not taken on their responsibilities under the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples to respect the prior and informed consent of First Nations in terms of legislation.

But having had an opportunity to speak to some of that in the past, I would like to take a bit of time to speak to an issue that I haven't actually spent as much time on in this debate, and that is my concern about the diminishment of the rights of the gay and lesbian community to gather together and freely associate in a safe space in order to speak with their peers about issues that may be important to them. Now, I have a couple of different angles from which I think it's important that we consider this legislation. One of them, of course, is the fact that in my 35-plus years as a social worker in the province of Alberta, I have worked with many people who have experienced various forms of family dysfunction and child abuse and neglect. I had the opportunity to work with many members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community and speak about how their family dynamic led to them being ostracized and treated extremely poorly, both within their family and outside of their family in the school system. Because, of course, if you're not supported by your family, it tends to bleed over into other areas of your life and create a great deal of stress for you.

I know that we can't always make laws for the few, and I realize that the LGBTQ2S-plus community is a minority within our population, but I think it's also very important that government not allow a dictatorship of the majority in cases where that majority chooses to diminish or eliminate the rights of the minority. The very nature of democracy is that we are not allowing a single mindset to rule and govern others or to deny rights to individuals who they don't like.

I think that it's fair to say that I'm talking about the slippery slope argument here and the thin edge of the wedge that's being created by this, and that is that it's very clear in the province of Alberta that we have taken the time here in this Chamber and throughout the province to discuss the nature of gay rights and to come to the decision that the gay community has rights that need to be protected, and that includes the rights that are protected for all of us under the Constitution, including the right to free association. I think it's important if we have made the decision, which we have in this Chamber, that the gay community has rights to the expression of their sexual orientation, that those rights are protected by the Human Rights Act.

I do remember members of the Progressive Conservative Party at the time talking about how proud they were to stand in this House to support the creation of the Human Rights Act and subsequently to ensure that the rights of the gay community are enshrined in that act. Now we have the next Conservative government coming and finding ways to surreptitiously undermine that right.

You know, I've spoken to that before. I've spoken to the fact that I think it's very dangerous when we start to say that we recognize rights exist but we're going to start to take away those rights from groups that we don't particularly admire or respect or engage with. I think that's the underlying argument there.

I want to also speak about the fact that the work that is done by gay-straight alliances is incredibly important work. As a social worker for over 35 years in the province of Alberta I can tell you that I have seen the consequence of when young gay people are in difficult family situations. I can tell you that I've worked with young people who have been in the process of coming out in their families and trying to describe their needs to their family members

and have seen very horrible – that's all I can say – things happen to them as a result.

Many of you will know that I have worked in the area of child abuse and neglect for the vast majority of my career and have seen the consequences for children that have come out in their families. I recognize that this isn't the majority or even a significant number of family members. The number of families in which child abuse or neglect occurs is somewhere around 7 or 8 per cent, generally, in the province of Alberta. I understand that I'm speaking for a small minority of people, but I feel like it's important that in a democracy we stand up and speak for a small minority of people. That's one of the great things about the Canadian democracy, that we have consistently done that. We've stood up and said that our laws need to govern all peoples, even peoples who are not widely represented by the overwhelming group in society.

I know that members on the opposite side of the House are fond of standing up and saying: we won a majority in the election, and it was even a really big one.

**An Hon. Member:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Feehan:** See? They're even cheering now. It's like a dog whistle. I can say it again and see if it happens.

But they did win a . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Feehan:** It works every time. Pavlovian.

I know that they like to say that, but then that very much worries me. That means that they fall into the problem of believing that a majority equates to a dictatorship, and I just don't think that that's an appropriate way for us to be viewing things.

Instead, we should be understanding that a majority helps to guide our movement forward in an appropriate way, but then we also need to say: what are the concerns of the minority? That was why we moved towards the creation of the human rights commissions in both the province of Alberta and the country of Canada. That's why we've had the protection of rights of individuals enshrined in those acts in this province and in the country. It's because even though it is only a small group, perhaps 7 per cent of the population, that experiences child abuse and neglect, I can tell you that the consequences of being a victim of child abuse and neglect are horrendous.

**2:40 a.m.**

I can tell you that, you know, I'm always cautious, as somebody who has dealt on a very personal level with people who've experienced that, before they talk about what happened to them. But I can tell you that kids that have come out to their families and the ones that showed up in my private practice in the work that I did would tell me stories about being rejected by their family members, having family members who would literally not speak to them again, being thrown out of their house, coming home one day and finding all of their baggage and suitcases out on the front step and being told, even though they were only 14 or 15 years of age, that they no longer could live in that house.

Most horrendously, I had a number of situations in which children were actually sexually abused by parents after coming out because they somehow diminished the child after that moment and felt that it was an appropriate punishment. I know that's horrendous and terrible. As somebody who has spent hours and hours and hours listening to those kinds of stories in dealing with people, I can tell you that the consequence of when that happens is so severe that even if it only happened to one child, it's something that we need to pay attention to. It's dramatic and horrible and terrible.

My concern here is that while I know the government says, "Look, you know, most of the time there'll be GSAs in a bunch of the schools," the fact that they are not willing to stand up and be counted for the human rights that would say, "No; GSAs need to be in every school" – and we know it's possible. We know that it is completely possible for a school system to put together a completely reasonable child safety program within their school. It's been done by public schools, it's been done by Catholic schools, and it's even been done by private schools. It's been done. The ones that aren't doing it, they're not resisting because it's too difficult; they're resisting because they're not prepared to respect the rights of the children, and I'm very concerned about that.

This is exactly the kind of situation with which I am concerned, that the consequences of coming from a dysfunctional family will be mostly exacerbated in a school system. To be rejected by your family, to be physically abused, or even, as I mentioned, sexually abused by your family as a result of your coming out and then to have that in any way reflected or echoed by the school system is very traumatic. I guess, you know, I think it's important that we take the time to reflect on how it is that we can prevent that kind of double trauma from occurring in a child's life. It's bad enough when the trauma occurs in the first place, but when it gets double downed by the system, it always makes it worse.

I know that there are many members of the other side who have talked about that. I've listened to the Member for Calgary-West many times talk about his concern as a police officer about seeing the abuse of children and how awful that was for him to have to witness that. Good on him to have that kind of empathy and open heart, to be sorely wounded by watching that kind of abuse going on, and I know that he has introduced legislation into the House in a private member's bill to ensure that that small minority of people who are abused are being taken care of by being able to approach police officers to report that kind of abuse. We on this side of the House stood up and supported that because we agree with him. We agree with that member of the government side who says that: yes, it only happens to a small group, but it is so serious that we need to pay attention to it and ensure that we do everything structurally possible to reduce the occurrence of it in the first place and to reduce the danger of double traumatization by the structural problems that occur within the institutions.

I just wish that same philosophy, the same belief system that was expressed already by government members, was being shared here again. We know it's there. We know they have an understanding of that philosophy. We know they're willing to stand up when they are suggesting it, but now we find that even though they have that experience and they demonstrated it here in the House, they're not willing to do so here. I'm very deeply concerned about that because of what happens to kids.

I could spend a lot of time talking about individual kids that I've worked with. I have to be careful not to say anything that would, you know, disclose information, so I'll talk more generally about children that are out of their house by the age of 14, that find themselves on the street and, because they are not streetwise, don't have very many places to go, and how vulnerable they become to what happens on the street. They go places to try to find a place to camp out for the night – under a bridge, in a doorway, that kind of thing – and who is it that generally comes up to talk to them in those situations? It's often people who are perpetrators against the vulnerable people in our society, who have that radar for kids that are vulnerable. They go and they find them and then they draw them into a world in which the child becomes somewhat invested.

One of the big traumas I dealt with is children often talking about how they felt guilty because they participated in the activities that were proffered by these abusive individuals and how awful that was

for them in terms of their sense of self. But I understood why they had to do that: because nobody else was listening to them. Their family wasn't listening to them. Their family put their suitcases out on the doorstep, and they were off on the street at the age of 14. The only person who would hear them out, the only person who offered them some care and guidance and so on, turned out to be a perpetrator and often sophisticated perpetrators who understood the cycle of perpetration and the grooming behaviour that is necessary to shift a child who is a potential victim into an actual victim.

That's what we're seeing here. One of the things that GSAs do is that they interrupt that. They interrupt it because they give a second, alternative place where you can be heard, you can be loved, and you can be received with open arms, not from a perpetrator who is only doing the kindness as a way of grooming you into engaging in activities which will subsequently cause you deep trauma not only because of the abusiveness of the activity itself but because of your belief that somehow you participated in it because you were seeking something. You were seeking some warmth, some relationship, some love with somebody who would be kind to you.

What we have instead is that we've created these wonderful clubs, these clubs where people do really amazing things like eat pizza and watch television and, you know, once a year put on pink T-shirts and say, "Everybody is lovable" and make little signs, little stickies to put on lockers that say: "You're a great person. Have a great day." That's the kind of activity that they're engaged in.

Imagine that you're a 14-year-old. You've been kicked out of your house, perhaps after having been physically or sexually abused, clearly emotionally or psychologically abused, and have an opportunity to go to a place where the underlying message is: you are valuable, you are loved, and you are worth while. You know, that's all we're asking for – and we're asking for every child, not just the ones coming from good, successful families but every child in the province of Alberta – the opportunity to experience that, to have a place where they can go where their vulnerability is not used as a licence for perpetration but, rather, their vulnerability is responded to in an empathetic, heartwarming, loving, reasonable way. That's all we're asking. It doesn't seem like much.

It seems that the government side of the House wants that, too, when it comes to introducing legislation to make changes in the child welfare act to enable people to report to police officers. Just last week we heard the government talking about how important that was. Yet here it is today, and everything that they were saying in support of that private member's bill would be completely relevant to this bill today, but they somehow forgot what happened last week, what came out of their mouths when it comes to the point that we're making here today.

We as a government have a responsibility for a preferential option for the vulnerable. That's one of our jobs. Otherwise, we end up in this place where the majority of people can do terrible things to the minority of people. I won't give examples because I tend to get myself in trouble when I do – I'm not going there again – but the point is that I think if we look at our history, we can find many examples where the majority of people made bad choices.

*2:50 a.m.*

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Chair and Speaker: two hats. Two hats, one human. One hat, I think, actually. It's sitting beside the chair. Thank you for this opportunity to engage. Over the last seven weeks, as it became clear that this bill was coming in and that this bill clearly had massive intended loopholes to create less welcoming and safe schools, students have

written me and other members of our caucus to share some of their experiences. I have written some of them back and said: would I have your permission to share this?

Here's one that I want to share. They wanted all members of this House to hear their experiences. Here we go.

QSAs save lives. I work with newcomer families, who have diverse cultural understandings of gender and sexuality. A student tried to come out as trans in elementary school and was told by school staff "it's a phase, just wait a little while and see how you feel." In middle school, they tried to die by suicide from the isolation. After we connected, we were able to refer them to their QSA, that they didn't know existed. They were able to join [the] QSA and safely meet and learn about gender diverse people. They came out again, [and] this time there was someone [there] to say "I believe you." In collaboration with the school QSA staff and our settlement staff, we were able to engage the parents with culturally appropriate conversations about gender and the importance of the QSA for their child. Today, they are a happy, engaged student with a rockin new hair cut and a new cultural outfit their dad bought them, that reflects their true gender.

They are a special kid, and we almost lost them. Instead, we get to see them thrive because this QSA and the staff were there to support them.

This is what we're talking about. We're not talking about doing things that are intended to create tension between parents and students; we're talking about finding ways to save kids' lives, literally. When we say this, I know sometimes people become desensitized, which is why I think hearing directly from people with lived experience and people who've worked with them about the fact that this was a kid who tried to die of suicide, this was a kid who saw no hope because they were told, "It's a phase, just wait a little while and [we'll] see how you feel." They knew how they felt. They felt like they wanted to die. I'm so glad that that child didn't die.

Madam Chair, I just want to call a point of order, actually.

**The Chair:** Point of order.

**Ms Hoffman:** Standing Order 13(5): "No person shall pass between the chair and the Table, nor the chair and the Mace." Just a reminder for everyone.

**The Chair:** Okay. Hon. member, that only applies for Assembly, not Committee of the Whole.

**Ms Hoffman:** Oh, really? Okay.

**The Chair:** A learning experience for us all right now.

**Ms Hoffman:** Hmm. It doesn't say that in the Standing Orders. That's good to know that that's been the interpretation. Thank you.

The point that I again want to make is that because there was a QSA there – and I know that we've spent a lot of time talking about the immediacy. I think that's an important conversation. I wish what we were talking about is the permanency, not the immediacy. I wish that it didn't take children feeling that they're at the point of despair and isolation to have to ask for there to be a club created. I know that this club being there, from reading this correspondence, made a big difference in this child's life. I think if they had to ask for a club after they'd already asked once for help with their understanding of their gender, that would have made it even more complicated for that young person, who was living such a difficult part of their life and their story.

I'll go to another story, perhaps. This person gave permission to use their name, so I will. This one is Sierra Grace.

When I was in high school, there were no GSA's. There was no safe place where you could go to explore your identity while still being a minor. Most of the time, I felt completely alone with my struggle.

While I walked the halls I was shoved into lockers and called a fag.

On more than one occasion I was physically assaulted by another student.

And when I went home things weren't much better. At first I was just ignored, my family didn't want to acknowledge my identity.

Then when I came out [finally] . . . as transgender, and therefore lesbian, my family treated me like an abomination.

They shouted at me for "mutilating" my body when I took my hormones, they threatened to cut off my hair, and for years my pronouns and new name were not respected

I was disowned, and [I was] kicked out of the house.

For a year, I lived either on my friend's couch or on the street.

I considered suicide almost every day and attempted it more than once.

But, the worst part was that I knew that I wasn't the only one going through this.

Many of my friends went through the same thing, they were kicked out, attempted suicide, and more than a few of them died. I'm going to say that again: more than a few of them died.

When I found out that my sister is gay, I was terrified for her.

I knew what our family was like, and I didn't want what happened to me to happen to her.

It was right around that time when I first heard of a GSA.

[A] supposed safe place for LGBTQ+ youth to go to.

A place [where] they could find support and resources regardless of what stage of self exploration they were at.

Parents weren't notified of your membership so you were free to come out in your own time.

It was a relief to know that my sister had somewhere to go and be safe.

As a result of the GSA at my sister's school she was able to navigate through high school much easier than I was, [and] she was able to educate my family on gay issues enough that she wasn't disowned and even I was allowed to be around my family again after years away.

Now, after GSA's have been established for quite a few years, there are proposed changes that [would] strip LGBTQ+ and questioning youth of their safe space.

The proposed changes would allow teachers to inform parents that their child has joined a GSA.

The risk of being outed would topple the structure of safety that we all have worked so hard to establish.

The changes would signal a return to how things were when I was in high school.

A return to LGBT youth being forced onto the streets or into a body bag if they weren't accepted.

A return to the constant fear of physical violence.

A return to a world where a gay couple can't hold hands in the same way that straight couples do every day.

This is the world that these changes could bring back.

But there is hope.

And that hope exists because we will continue [to fight] for our LGBTQ+ youth.

It exists because there are people, like us, who will accept these youth and support them through whatever the world throws at them.

I'll give copies of these to *Hansard*, who I know works to make sure that they reflect the discussion here and, I think, even more importantly, the prose that these folks supplied to us and asked that we put on the record, and that the people who are here, making

decisions about the lives of these youth and other youth who – honestly, the number of youth who probably are too busy just going day by day, surviving, to stress out about what’s being done in this Chamber are the ones that I think we need to pause and pay extra close reflection to, because I know that there are some who feel strong enough to come and speak. I know that there are some who feel strong enough to stand in the rain on the steps of the Legislature and make sure that their voices are heard.

But there are countless others who are too busy just trying to survive, and having an opportunity to go to a lunchroom, a classroom, watch TV together, make positive affirmations, tell each other, “you are loved, you are valued, and we will keep you safe” – when I attended the rally that the students organized in Calgary, probably four weeks ago now, that was their message. They had us all chant it together, and it was really powerful, actually. You are loved, you are valued, and we will keep you safe: that’s all they’re asking for. They’ve made great strides over the last, probably, 10 years.

**3:00 a.m.**

A lot of this started because of the It Gets Better campaign, that I’m sure many of you probably remember starting in the U.S. Seattle, I think, is where it first started. It Gets Better was a good message. It happened, of course, right after there were gay men, youth murdered and many committing suicide. The message was: “It gets better, so tough it out. It’ll be a few more years. It’ll get better.” For many it does.

But what the youth here in Edmonton and around Alberta, many of them, told us is: “Thanks for telling us that. You actually have the power to do something to make it better. It’s nice for you to give us messages of hope, but you can actually act to make it better today instead of telling us that we have to wait to be adults to be who we are.” Fair point. Good on those youth. They shouldn’t have to wait until they are living on their own to be able to express who they are. They shouldn’t have to wait until they are older to be able to feel loved.

They shouldn’t have to wait until they pass adolescence to stop wanting to kill themselves. The statistics are appalling, and I imagine many of my colleagues will probably go through them. The number of homeless youth who identify as LGBTQ is, I think, about five times what the population is of youth who identify as LGBTQ. Statistically, being gay makes you more likely to be homeless. Being gay makes you more likely to fail high school, to drop out of high school. Being gay makes you more likely to do self-harm. Being gay makes you more likely to commit suicide. When you look at statistics like this – and I think a big part of our responsibilities as government is to look at data and trends and think about how public policy can be created to counter them and to keep people safe, to show them they are loved, and to make sure that they are valued. It’s a pretty simple message that these kids are sending us.

We have an opportunity here tonight. Just yesterday the motion was passed saying: vote with your conscience. Vote with your conscience. I imagine there are many, many members of this place who, when they agreed to run and sought nominations, sought nominations because they really cared about pipelines, jobs, and the economy, and they believed their leader when he said: social issues are not things that we will legislate on. Then here we are, seven weeks in, and we’re considering a bill that legislates on social issues and can cause grave harm. I don’t expect that most people who ran in the last election ran to cause grave harm, ran to increase the likelihood of suicide, self-harm, homelessness, dropouts, and family dysfunction.

The thing is that we’ve seen from one case study with two women in southern Alberta, or two people in southern Alberta, in the same family – I shouldn’t presume women – how differently it can go when people have the opportunity to express themselves on their own timeline and with the love and support of staff at a school to support them in having difficult conversations with their family and how that can be so healing, not just for that immediate relationship but for other relationships in that family as well.

I really do hope that the motion that was voted on last night is something that applies today. I guess this will be probably one of the first tests. I think that we have a real opportunity to see if people are actually supported in voting with their conscience when it comes to pieces of what I would say are socially regressive legislation.

We’re not asking that we move the yardstick forward. I want to be very clear on that. We’re asking that we don’t move it backwards. We don’t need to always be moving forward, but please don’t move us backwards, don’t cause more harm for these kids, because they have made it very clear that they want to be loved, they want to be valued, and they want to be kept safe. That’s it. They don’t want government to make choices that put them in harm’s way. I think that we owe it to them to hear their voices.

I imagine that there will be more stories from these youth that we will hear in the coming hours, and I certainly appreciate how many sent us their stories. There might even be some sitting up right now listening to this debate, and if they want to send them to me, I’ll check my e-mail, sarah.hoffman@assembly.ab.ca. I imagine we’ll hear more of these over the night. I had somebody reach out to me on Instagram the other day, when we were talking about the bad-faith bargaining bill, and my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre read their comments into the record. I think it’s pretty powerful to see elected representatives in the Official Opposition be able to act in such a responsive way. To these two people who took the time to share their stories, I really want to say thank you.

I’m sure that there will be many more because I think that this is something that a lot of people care deeply about. I know that we’re discussing it here in the middle of the night on the first week of summer holidays. Perhaps that was by design; perhaps it was by coincidence. There aren’t really a ton of people here filling the Chamber, but there are a ton of people who do care deeply about this issue.

When they find out about the impacts, I think that many of them will wonder why it is that the new UCP government chose to make this one of their first bills, why it is that when, clearly, beginning with the leadership selection, members of the media and public were asking, “Well, are you going to legislate on social issues?” and were told over and over again, “Don’t worry; we’re not going to legislate on social issues” – and then here we are with Bill 8, Bill Hate, Bill Straight, whatever you want to call it.

**Ms Phillips:** Call it Bill Hate.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah. Bill Hate, Bill Straight, Bill 8, hateful Bill 8, whatever you want to call it, whatever is in order.

I’m sure that this is something that a lot of people didn’t expect to be a high priority item. We did. We anticipated that this might come, but I don’t think a lot of the electorate probably did. It’s disappointing to me.

The one other piece I’m going to mention with regard to this in general is that when I was with Edmonton public, I heard from a number of staff who, after the youth asked for their schools to create GSAs, felt so much more empowered and supported in being who they were, feeling loved and feeling respected. I remember talking

to one teacher who said: “For the first time I’ve hung a picture of my spouse and myself in my classroom. I wasn’t afraid I was going to get fired. I wasn’t afraid I was going to get transferred.”

I remember receiving some correspondence from some parents who were not supportive. Let’s be frank. There are going to be people speaking up who aren’t ready for where the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has landed, which is that you can’t be discriminated against based on your sexual orientation or gender identity. I remember reading one of these e-mails to somebody who worked at the school board, and I was pretty emotional. It was somebody who said: if I ever found out that my kid was in a classroom with a gay teacher, I’d pull them from that classroom, and I’d transfer them to another school, and I’d make sure that they weren’t subject to learning from somebody who is gay.

I read this e-mail to this principal, who said: “Sarah, on my first day as a principal I walked into the staff room and saw a teacher with a cigarette hanging out of their mouth giving the kid the strap. You know, times change. We have to help people catch up.” That’s true. Times do change. That was the late ’70s, early ’80s. We haven’t had smoking in schools since probably the late ’80s or early ’90s. I think the strap left in the early ’90s, corporal punishment. It was sort of a blurry timeline. I think it went school district by school district.

But times have changed, and I think it’s time that we catch up. At least, don’t move backwards. That’s what these kids are asking us to do, to keep the yard marker where it’s at today. Don’t move the ball back up the field. Let’s make sure that we keep protecting these youth and we keep finding ways to show them that they are loved, they are valued, and that we will keep them safe.

Those are some of the remarks I wanted to share at this point in the evening. I imagine there will be more as time continues. Thank you so much, colleagues, for your consideration.

**3:10 a.m.**

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I’ll just caution you that there were a few times where you may have said your name. One was in an e-mail format. Just to caution you moving forward that even if you’re spelling your name . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** Oh, thank you. Did I? I did spell it. Yeah. Sorry. Thank you.

**The Chair:** You did say it, too, but just a caution to all members.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I’ve risen in this House multiple times to share my thoughts on Bill 8, Bill Hate, Bill Straight, whatever you’d like to call it, as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora noted. The last time I spoke, I spoke a lot about sort of the mental health side of things, the higher rates of suicide. I talked about my own struggles, not just with coming out and with being a closeted teacher in rural Alberta but just seeing what some of my own students went through. I talked about my regrets, and I talked about how I still, with regret, look back on not calling out homophobia that I saw as a teacher in rural Alberta.

It was interesting. Just yesterday one of my former students actually messaged me and said, you know, that he hated so much the school environment he was in, that I taught at as well in rural Alberta. He said that he’d been called “fag” and he’d be subject to homophobic slurs, and that just really reinforced for me – you know, he doesn’t identify as a queer person anyway. He went on to

say: it’s fine; I’m a strong person now, and I’ve left that. It just really reinforced for me just how important this is. This is not ancient history. These are stories that are happening now. As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said, all of us, I think, at least on this side of the House, have countless personal accounts that we can share and that we will be sharing.

I think that the interesting thing is that as hard as this has been, to be having to, I guess, fight this battle at this point, it also has been really positive because I’ve heard so many stories. I’ve had so many people reach out – like the Member for Edmonton-Glenora noted, you know, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook – so many young people reaching out and wanting to share their stories, wanting to just send kudos to us for how proud they are that they see people fighting for them, reaching out to me individually and saying that it means a lot to have somebody from the community in the Legislature, somebody who is unapologetically queer and open, because many people aren’t there yet. I wasn’t there for a very long time. I wasn’t there until I was a grown adult in my late 20s.

I’ve shared, and I’ve got many, many more stories that I can share if need be. I’ve shared a lot of, you know, accounts from students in particular and some of their own struggles, some of which are really hard to hear and hard to read, but they’re real, and they’re raw. It’s important that we don’t sugar-coat this.

Now, I’d like at this early hour, though, to start by sharing the voice of both a parent and an academic. Her words, I think, really show what being an ally is, what being a vocal proponent is even when you aren’t directly affected by these issues. I’m going to start by sharing those. She wrote, actually, a pretty detailed letter, and then she actually sent a follow-up letter as well, if you will indulge me on that. She addressed this to me, and she says:

I wanted to share with you a letter that I sent to the minister of education today. I also wanted to thank you for your tireless and impassioned efforts to protect GSAs in Alberta schools. You have my support and the support of [many, many] Albertans. Here [is what] I sent to the [Education] minister.

She’s totally fine with me sharing her name and her information.

My name is Amy Abe. I am a multi-award winning educator, nationally recognized, with a background in educational policy and leadership. I thank you for taking the time to read my comments and concerns when it comes to GSAs in Alberta schools. I urge you to read my comments, though they may not align with your feelings on this matter.

While I recognize that GSAs will still be allowed to form in theory, the matter of the protections that once surrounded them being senselessly stripped away is another . . . We know from experience that protections and regulations are necessary, especially when it comes to human rights. We have human rights declarations by virtue of the fact that there are those who violate them. We have UNDRIP [the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples], which exists by virtue of the fact that people violate those principles. We have warning messages on inedible products saying, “do not eat this” by virtue of the fact that some people do eat those inedible things. When it comes to GSAs, we must recognize that there are adults – [including] principals and teachers – who will deny the right of the GSA to exist, which is why their right to exist must be protected in legislation. We know that adults may not exercise the best judgment when it comes to ‘informing’ parents of GSA participation in the same way that many don’t exercise judgment when [say] they consume that inedible [product].

We also know that many educators are uncomfortable with the word “gay.” What this means is, these adults are uncomfortable with the idea that gay people exist at all and therefore they use [that] discomfort as a way of making invisible not only the LGBTQ2 population but also their specific concerns around safety and inclusion.

Yet gay people exist. Gay youth exist, and these youth are specifically targeted by both adults and peers for abuse and harassment because of this discomfort, which is really a poor euphemism for bigotry.

Should we let people who are 'uncomfortable' with the gay community guide governmental decision-making? Should people who are 'uncomfortable' with gay . . . youth be the ones who make decisions about their safety and well-being? Imagine if educators [were to say that] they were uncomfortable with words "Black" or "Blind" or "Woman." Would this be acceptable? These are educators who could use their privilege and discomfort to foster marginalization and discrimination.

These are, in fact, the educators who could themselves benefit from the formation of GSAs.

These are the same educators who do not understand what it means to create a safe space for youth who are targeted for hate, abuse, and marginalization, and may not take the best steps to protect these children. These are also the parents who might, upon learning their child is part of the LGBTQ2 community, . . . throw them onto the streets,

where they become vulnerable to further adult exploitation.

LGBTQ2 youth are over-represented among homeless youth and are over-represented in youth suicide deaths. This number is not shrinking, but it could with the kind of work and safety a protected . . . GSA could provide. Sometimes, it is the adults that children must be protected from, and this is why those fundamental legal protections around GSA formation ought to remain in place.

It's also true that schools do have anti-bullying policies. Yet, to suggest that a GSA is formed merely as an anti-bullying measure is to suggest that [say] Shoppers Drug Marts are built to merely provide the latest shade in lipstick – that is to say, you're missing fundamental aspects of their purpose and [their] impact in a community. The kinds of education and supports that GSAs provide extend beyond anti-bullying.

And when it comes to antibullying, we should not assume that the solution to the issue of bullying is one size fits all. We do not treat all cancers the same way. We do not provide the same mental health care for postpartum mothers that we do for trauma victims.

We should not be asking ourselves why LGBTQ2 youth need a 'special' place. What we really should be asking is, what is it about this space that necessitates having that (special) space? What is it about this space that is inherently marginalizing, threatening, or even dangerous?

I suggest to you that a decision to take away the protection surrounding GSAs is not one that should be divided by party lines or political ideology. It should not be a political act to say, "I will do everything within my power to ensure children are safe at school."

**3:20 a.m.**

Protecting GSAs does not affect jobs or employment rates.

It does not affect the number of hospital beds or who pays for health care. It does not increase or decrease class sizes. It does not make it easier for teachers to do their jobs. It is a decision that [purely and simply] affects the safety of children [and young people, and as such, it is] a decision that should be bringing people, and political parties, together.

You have the power to do this, to bring people together, to make children safe.

Therefore, it should be a simple matter of saying, "I prioritize safety", even if you do not need that safety yourself or [you don't] comprehend why others need it – [people] are telling you, GSA protections are necessary. Removing those protections seems to be a decision that seems to be made out of, at the very best, ignorance, or at the very worst, out of spite or [perhaps] a distinct lack of empathy. I strongly urge you, to reconsider your position on GSA protections.

There is integrity in coming to understand and appreciate a perspective that is not initially your own, to change one's position in the face of compelling evidence.

She says:

My fear is that politicians in general are afraid to 'hear' and be guided by the 'other' side because of ego or 'face'. Is [this] 'face' worth the cost of children's safety and well-being? Please do not let this be the case. Let the safety and well-being of Alberta's students be your guiding principle. Let the voices of those this decision will actually affect be the experts who guide your decision-making.

Now, she sent a follow-up e-mail as well, and I'll read some of that. But I just want to touch on a couple of points that Amy made in her letter and her final point around integrity and coming to understand and appreciate a perspective that's not your own and to change one's position when there's alternate evidence, when there's evidence to support that: "You know what? You might want to take a second look."

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora noted, you know, that we've had discussion in this House around matters of conscience, and I shared yesterday that there have been a couple of folks in this House on the other side who have come up to me after I've spoken on issues related to LGBTQ2S and have expressed their support. I appreciate that – I really do – because it shows that these aren't partisan issues, and it shows that you take value in what I've said. But I ask those members and others who've maybe not shared with me but I know are allies and I know take these issues seriously: this is an opportunity to show your constituents what side of history you're willing to be on. Do consider your freedom to vote according to conscience as we continue to discuss Bill 8 and as we talk about some of the amendments that you know are forthcoming.

I also just want to touch on another point that she made. She said that protecting GSAs doesn't affect jobs or employment rates. You know, we know that this government was elected on a message of jobs, the economy, and pipelines. We've all got it memorized. It was clearly an effective line. This is not related to any of those issues, directly anyway, although I think you could make a tangential connection. This is about fundamental human rights. If we are now going to be discussing social issues, here's an opportunity to, again, show where you stand.

I want to finally just touch on, before I come back to some of her remarks, the point about LGBTQ youth being overrepresented among homeless youth and overrepresented in youth suicide deaths. I've shared those stats, actually, a couple of times in this House already, so I won't note them again, but the evidence is there. Again, I'll come back to her argument, that in the face of evidence, let's think about the power we have here to heed that evidence, to heed that research that exists, the large body of research that exists to show that strong GSA protections do in fact, do indeed save lives.

As I said, I want to just point out that – I told Amy that I really wanted to share her comments here in the House. She sent a follow-up e-mail, which she personalized. She said:

I have two children, aged 6 and 8. They're young, they're tiny little children. They're still . . . Ninjago.

And, like, I don't actually know what Ninjago is.

**Ms Phillips:** Ninjago.

**Member Irwin:** Ninjago. Thank you. I need to look at that. Lego, but ninja, maybe? Okay.

She says:

I don't know if my kids are cis or trans, gay or straight or somewhere in between – but whoever they will be, they already are. As they grow into adolescence and young adulthood, there is nothing I can do to 'make' them gay or 'keep' them straight. As

they grow into adolescence and young adulthood, my children will discover who they already are. This, for most youth (regardless of where they are . . . ), is tumultuous and confusing on so many levels.

She says:

As a cis, hetero woman, I didn't have the same pressures on me that LGBTQ2 youth have, like the fear of wondering if my parents would disown me for being straight or bringing home a boy, and while there has always been a concern of gendered violence, my sexual orientation was never on my . . . radar. I had that privilege.

I want my kids to have that privilege – not the privilege of being straight, but the privilege of being in a school where it won't matter if they're straight, [if they're] gay, or questioning, or cis, or trans. They are who they are. I want them to be [just] surrounded by adults and children who have their best interests at heart. I want them to swim in the river without worrying about the water.

More than this, my children will have gay classmates. They will have gay teachers. This is an inevitability. It is a certainty. I want them to be part of a school and a community that knows how to demonstrate acceptance and compassion and appreciation. I want my children to grow into the kind of people who know what ally-ship and advocacy means. I want them to become people like you and all those out there who have been fighting against the kind of laws that would put kids, all Alberta kids, in a kind of jeopardy.

She says:

Thank you for the work you have done, and . . . I'm certain you will continue doing. Just wanted you to know that Albertans aren't ready to give up . . . yet, and we're out here, thinking of the kids, and we've got your back in the same way you've got ours.

I want us to heed the words of Amy and the many parents I've heard from on this issue. Again, what struck me the most about her words and about some of the other words that have been shared with me: again, they're from folks who aren't even directly affected by these issues, but they have a vision for the kind of Alberta they want for their kids, the kind of society that they want in the future. She talks about how important it is for her six- and eight-year-old children to be in an open, welcoming school environment no matter what their sexual or gender orientation is or will be. She talks about privilege. She talks about the fact that she acknowledges her own privilege in that she's not had to worry, she's not had to experience any of these challenges herself, and she acknowledges that she's fortunate, but she also points out that she recognizes not everyone is, right?

Again, I said this once in the House before. I would bet every member in this House has people in their lives who are members of the LGBTQ2S community. If you don't – I know you do. You just may not know. They may not have shared that with you yet. So I want them to think about those people in your lives, and I also want them to think about, Madam Chair, their own privilege and how fortunate they may have been to have not experienced any discrimination, any oppression, any microaggressions because of their gender, because of their sexual identity, because of their sexual orientation.

I think I still have a few more moments. I'd like to share an example from a young person because, as I said, even today – oh, I've only got a minute left. Well, just talking about Alyssa, who's a teacher and a GSA co-ordinator at a school in my riding, I met with her today, and she's a queer person herself. She's a gay teacher, and she just talked about how, you know, important GSAs are, how life-changing she's seen that they are for her own students. What an opportunity for those young people to have a teacher who's such a leader, someone from the community and someone who's fighting day in and day out for those kids in her school, and she's worried.

She's definitely worried. She's in a school where, you know, the administration, the staff are pretty open, but she knows it's not like that everywhere else. She knows that there are schools in Edmonton where there remain a lot of challenges for both school staff and students.

As I wrap up my comments here, I just really want to reiterate my point. Let us consider the voices of these students, of these teachers, and of these parents as we move forward with debating Bill 8.

3:30 a.m.

**The Chair:** Are there other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise again tonight, this early hour of the morning, to continue an important debate in discussion on Bill 8. I recognize that this is a bill on which we have had a lot of discussion, one which I have spoken to many times and that I've approached from a lot of different angles. This morning I'd like to take the opportunity to follow, I guess, in the footsteps of my colleagues, who have been taking this opportunity this morning to reflect on the voices of Albertans that we are hearing from, who are expressing their concerns with the introduction of this bill, with the specific aspects of the Education Act that are looking at changing, basically eliminating particular provisions that are there to protect the ability of students to expediently, in a reasonable length of time without obstacle, without undue delay, form a peer support group known as a gay-straight alliance or queer-straight alliance and ensure that their participation in that club would not in any way endanger their personal well-being by it being revealed against their will.

As I've mentioned previously in this debate, this is an issue that is of great significance to many of my constituents and a large number of people that came out to volunteer and support my re-election campaign, who specifically stated their concerns that a United Conservative Party government would take just this kind of step. I know that it's true for many of my colleagues as well, and indeed we've had the opportunity to reach out and speak with many. Several have sent us their thoughts, and I'd like to share the thoughts of one mother from the city of Lethbridge.

She says:

I thought I brought my daughter up in a house where everyone is accepted and loved for being them. She ate with Muslim friends at Eid, celebrated Christmas with Christians, would light candles for missing and murdered indigenous women and walked in the city Pride Parade in various outfits: always dancing and always celebrating diversity, inclusion and love. Over the years different clues hung in the air and I let them settle. I let them settle because she needed to know she was my girl, no matter who she brought home, loved or obsessed over – as only teenage girls do. As different questions arose – I aimed to answer them, as different observations were made of the people she found attractive as we walked through a mall or park – always female, always cute, I would listen without judgement. So I thought she was safe. I thought she felt welcomed and accepted and loved. But the night came when she decided to come out: watching her struggle, sobbing through the hair hung over her face, terrified of rejection – I realized just how much more I needed to do to make it less traumatic for her. I hadn't created a safe enough environment for her to come out with ease because ultimately, with so much hate, diatribe and politicizing of sexuality – I couldn't overcome those constant negative messages and hate alone. It would have indeed taken a village to make her feel safe and our society is not there yet. It's after watching her in such distress with me, someone who loves her more than life itself, that I realized what a vital role GSAs play for those young people who need support, the tools to

communicate understanding and acceptance. I don't want the blood or life of young people who suicide or harm themselves on my hands because they've been rejected by family. Community, here in Southern Alberta is not yet as inclusive as we may hope, families aren't quite as safe and school, for many, is the happiest place they can be – yet you [Mr. Premier] wish to take that away from the kids who are most at risk. Please leave kids to be safe in GSAs and be accepted in at least one place – school. Teach them and support them, don't out them and devalue them in the name of politics and votes. Lastly, I'll tell you what I said that night as my beautiful, clever and kind daughter told me to expect her to bring girls home to meet us – I said: You can bring home anyone you want, [bring them] home for dinner and we'll love them and accept them too, but just don't bring home a bigot.

She has some strong words here for the Premier. She suggests that he is not a guest that she would wish to have for dinner, but she does wish him love and wishes that he would never have the life of a young person on his conscience, yet experience and statistics and this hostile climate that he has had a part in creating suggests that may happen. She concludes by saying:

Don't buy the votes of bigots [Mr. Premier], please. I urge you: protect and love the brave.

That's quite a story from a mother who very much loved and supported her daughter, who very much wanted to provide that daughter with a safe and accepting home, who went well out of her way to promote tolerance and diversity in their family but discovered that even that was not enough because of the environment that her daughter was living in, other influences in the community, voices in the media, the ongoing struggles we have as human beings to advance and progress in how we view others and see the world.

All that cumulatively still wore her daughter down to the point where even with a mother that was open and accepting and had always been willing to listen to her, it was a difficult and painful thing for her to come out. What I appreciate about this mother's words is that she's willing to recognize that there can be value in having other help and supports to support her daughter. She does not take that as a personal threat. She does not take that as a judgment on her own ability as a parent. Indeed, as we discuss this bill and we discuss the importance of GSAs, I think it's important to highlight that we are not looking to pass judgment on any parent.

You know, Madam Chair, I think back to my own adolescence, and it was not an easy time. I've talked before in this House about the personal struggles that I had with my mental health, with anxiety, with many questions about who I was. I do not question the fact that my parents loved me or that they wanted the best for me, but they were not able to provide everything I needed. If I'd had the opportunity to access a peer support group like this – although for me it was not a struggle of questions of my sexuality or the sorts of things that young people struggle with, their gender identity or other questions about themselves. Still, if I'd had the opportunity and a safe space to be able to talk through the things that I could not talk with my parents about – which indeed later in life I did have the opportunity to talk with them about, when we were both in a better place and had a chance to grow, but which at that time simply was not possible – the difference that could have made for me personally. And in saying that, that is not in any way a judgment on my parents. It's simply reflecting the reality and recognizing the limitations that we have as human beings and the value that different supports and aspects of community can add.

**3:40 a.m.**

Now, part of the challenge here is that to a large extent I don't think there's any member of this House that would stand here and disagree with what I just said. Every member of this House that has

stood to speak to this bill has said that they, in fact, support exactly that and that they believe that GSAs should in fact have the right to exist. That's progress. We've come a ways from when this first came up for discussion in this Legislature under Bill 10, at least in that we've reached the point where it's no longer politically saleable to come out and publicly say that you are against GSAs. But let's set that aside. I will say that I genuinely believe all members of this House support the existence of a GSA.

Now, the question we have, though, is why we feel the need to reduce the protections that are put in place to be able to allow them to exist, to allow students to participate in them and to do so safely, to feel secure that the information about their participation, about the things they may have to share in what is supposed to be a safe space will not be shared without their direct consent and permission, why we feel that it should not be one hundred per cent clear that when a student makes this request, it should be granted immediately, without delay.

There has been much discussion about balance, and the suggestion that working to close some of these loopholes, which, again, were clearly identified and which we had clear examples of their being exploited, the suggestion that somehow, in working to close those, we were upsetting balance and we were taking away the rights of parents or schools to hold their own particular private views. When we are talking about balance, Madam Chair, we are talking about a balance of power. So if we are having that discussion about the balance of power in these situations, we have to ask: whose power are we speaking of? What power do these students have in this situation? I'd say: relatively little for youth that are in this vulnerable position, who are LGBTQ2S-plus, who are struggling with their identity, who are attempting to find their place in a world that until fairly recently has been hostile to that identity.

These are not youth that are coming in with an agenda. These are not youth that are coming in and attempting to create trouble. These are youth who are simply looking for an opportunity to have a place of safety and to provide that safety to others. Students within a school system are generally subject to power and authority by their teachers, their principals, their administrators, the authority of their parents, the authority of a number of figures in their lives. What we are attempting to balance here is that power and authority of all these different figures in their lives with the needs of the young people themselves.

I think that when we have had clear demonstration that some of those individuals, some of those authorities, some of those figures who wield and hold power have used that power to attempt to stymie these youth, to block them, to delay them, it really doesn't matter the reason for that. Whether it is out of honest belief that they are morally protecting these youth by doing so or whether it is out of some form of prejudice, it does not matter what the reason. The fact is that they are abusing the power that has been put in their hands. The question of balance, then, Madam Chair, is about ensuring that such abuse does not and is not able to take place, which is the reason that we brought forward the changes that we did in Bill 24.

I have here another letter, written by another resident of southern Alberta. He says:

Gay Straight Alliances are an important part of creating a safe and respectful environment for all students in every school in our province. The schools where those student led clubs are most needed, those schools with intolerant administrators, teachers, and students are those least likely to provide voluntary and enthusiastic support for students. As we have seen since the passage of [the legislation], there are many individuals who do not want to support these student led clubs. I have sat in conversations with school board trustees and former

superintendents where they discussed how to circumvent the legislation and deny full support to these students. I sat in meetings where those same individuals discussed how to inform the parents of these students that they were in those clubs, knowing that would out extremely vulnerable students – teenagers and children – to their parents. I know teenagers who have been made homeless in grade 11 and 12 because someone outed them to their parents. Outing a person is an inherently violent act, and by passing Bill 8, [this Premier's] conservatives are allowing and even encouraging parents and administrators to do that to their own students. Parents and caregivers should be the safe and loving first resource, support, and advocate of every child. Tragically, that is not always the case. Parents who love and support their children, who have regular and open conversations about their child's interests, personality, and identity will be aware of things that pertain to their child's life, like their participation in a student led club, or their child's orientation and identity. Allowing or encouraging educators to out their students in this manner is totally unnecessary and even dangerous. In the words of a parent from Stirling, Alberta, "If I know my kids, then I'll be fine." Professional psychological and education associations across North America conclude that outing children and teenagers to unsupportive or homophobic parents is unethical. It can be completely unforeseen as well. Teachers know parents on a more impersonal level than do their children. Allowing children to have those sensitive conversations with parents when it is safe for them to do so is best. Please do not put that kind of pressure on students, on teachers, or on administrators. Please continue to ensure that all students have a right to a school supported group for community that is not subject to the whims of unsupportive school staff. Please make schools safe, welcoming and respectful places for all Albertans; every single one of us. Respect our humanity. Stop pandering to a fearful base. Be leaders in compassion, kindness, understanding, and empathy. Do not pass this law that fundamentally leaves schools unsafe places, and lets adults bully children, protected by their status and by the systems they are a part of. This is an unnecessary and harmful law. For the sake of my children; for the sake of our schools and teachers and public institutions; for the sake of our communities . . .

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

3:50 a.m.

**Ms Phillips:** All right. Well, good morning, Madam Chair. I often say that it's my pleasure to rise to speak to a bill. What I've said about Bill Hate, though, is that it is not my pleasure to rise to speak to this bill. It's my profound irritation to rise and speak to this bill.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I think it would be okay if we were not having the conversation in and around GSAs. You know, we can disagree on some of the age of access or transportation or other provisions within the Education Act, and that's fine. But on this issue, Mr. Chair, this one makes me wonder. It makes me wonder about the real priorities of this government, makes me wonder about the actual priorities of my hon. colleagues, and makes me wonder about what the motivation is.

I think the first thing that I want to talk about – and I'm sure I'll have other opportunities; I've got a whole bunch of rants in me on this topic – is: why are we doing this? Like, why are we standing here having this conversation? Really, why we're doing this and the reason why it was such a high priority is because this provision of this act is aimed at a specific group of people. We know that that's not where great public policy comes from, so that's the first kind of problem with this.

What we're doing here is that we're aiming at relieving 28 schools, private schools, of their obligations under the current legislation to establish a safe, inclusive, and caring schools policy that's consistent with the basic principles of immediacy and confidentiality in forming a GSA or a QSA and then with how people's membership in that club is sort of managed and how the status of their membership and that information is managed at the level of the school. What this is about is relieving those 28 schools of the duty to follow the law as it is currently written.

To be clear, everyone else has complied with this rule. There are hundreds of schools in this province, various charter, faith-based schools. I'm thinking here of the Jewish school in southwest Calgary, to which some of my friends' children go. I'm thinking here of some of the Islamic schools that are within the public system, within the charter system. I'm thinking here of Catholic schools, all of whom have complied with Bill 24, for all of whom, really, you know, this topic is ticking along just fine.

There are these 28 remaining schools. They're being represented by John Carpay in a lawsuit. The idea here is that they won't have to continue with their lawsuit and John Carpay won't have to continue to represent these people for not following the law if this passes. Right? That's nice, that we're doing specific legislation to satisfy the John Carpays of the world. You know, down memory lane here: this is a dude who compared the pride flag to a swastika, which is not only really awful for LGBT people and what the pride flag means for LGBT people in terms of struggle and equality, but it's also super, deeply offensive to Jewish people. But he wasn't kicked out, and he wasn't particularly censured for those remarks. I think he, like, did a sort of half-apology, half-hearted, and then, I think, promptly doubled down.

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Ms Phillips:** We're doing that . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Member, please. A point of order.

#### Point of Order Relevance

**Mr. McIver:** Well, under Standing Order 23 it talks about talking about matters that are not part of what's before us, and I think the hon. member was doing just that. I know that she feels strongly about what she's saying, but it just doesn't happen to be relevant to the bill that's before the House.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much.  
Would you like to respond?

**Ms Phillips:** Sure. I believe that the sentence or at least the paragraph – we could check the Blues – began with: why are we having this conversation about this bill? That is directly related to the bill. You know, while I think it's nice that the hon. member has now woken up, this is not a point of order.

**The Acting Chair:** Hon. member, I'd caution you. You're kind of crossing the line there with mentioning the other member's status in the House. If you would please just stick to the bill at hand. It is getting late.

#### Debate Continued

**Ms Phillips:** Sure. This is why we are having this conversation about Bill 8, and this is the background for this conversation. You know, I think that what's interesting here is that a lot of this doesn't

really have to do with some of the basic tenets of conservative thought and some of the reasons why I have a lot of time for conservatives overall. I would basically boil it down to three things, the things that I like the best about conservatives, which are respect for individual liberty, rule of law, and respect for institutions and the establishment. That's where this bill, point one, is wildly offside of the concept of individual liberty in particular: the individual's ability to disclose their sexuality on their own time, their own terms, an individual's right to in fact have their own choice of sexuality or gender identity.

I think the why is very interesting, and I think that what we're doing here is making a law for one group that doesn't actually uphold that basic concept that undergirds a lot of conservative thought and is one of the reasons why, you know, at least historically, a social democrat like me could have a beer with a conservative, which is that both have a great deal of time for individual liberty. That's one of the big issues with this bill.

The other issue that I think needs to be queried a little bit is around how open-hearted expressions of faith then intersect with the rule of law around individual liberty. These things are not at odds. We've often heard the Premier talk about how these things are at odds, and they're just not, Mr. Chair. I think it's important to unravel that a little bit. I think, you know, the vast, vast majority of people of faith would agree with me on this, that in an open-hearted expression of faith, whatever the faith-based system is, we take care of one another. We understand that we have certain individual liberties, all of us, and that faith is a community. A community has certain responsibilities to one another. I think that's one of the reasons why this bill is, in fact, so irritating to me, and that is because we're seeing a number of excuses dressed up as expressions of faith, which I think are not particularly valid. I'll refer here to other expressions of faith in correspondence that I have received from faith leaders.

Just as an aside here, one of the reasons why I feel so passionately about LGBT issues, why I've dedicated my life to trying to learn how to be a decent ally, a decent human being on these topics, is because one of the first places I ever encountered these issues as a teenager was actually through the Anglican faith.

**4:00 a.m.**

You know, I was raised in the Anglican faith. I was baptized Anglican. I would go to youth camps when I was a kid and a teenager, in particular. That was a long time ago, and I'm very old, so it was the first place that I learned about apartheid, for example. It was the first place that I learned about sort of international social justice. It was the first place I learned about LGBT issues, the first place I ever met a gay person, in fact. You know, when you grow up kind of on the farm north of Spruce Grove, Alberta, you don't come across a whole lot of that, not at that time. To that end, what I learned from the faith community was that open-hearted expression of community and that understanding of our care for one another. That's where I think it's important to give that faith community a voice, in particular in this House on this bill, because people from different faith communities have reached out to me on this matter.

One person – no relation – is Erin Phillips. Erin is the chaplain of the University of Lethbridge, and she's also an Anglican minister. I think she's out of Taber now, but she was at Coaldale, and my mom was her parishioner for some time. Here's what Erin has to say about GSAs.

I've been working with university and college students for almost 25 years as chaplain and nearly 30 as an instructor. I've gotten to know many students who grew up in environments where they didn't feel it was safe for them to be honest about who they were.

I've dealt with the long-term damage that that kind of fear and vigilance has caused them. In a few tragic cases I've been involved with their funerals. I've also worked in the parish for over 20 years, and as a parish priest I've worked with many youth. I've been grateful that the two churches I've served were open and welcoming communities, but I know it isn't the case with all churches. It's a difficult time for many kids as they try to sort out who they are and what's important to them. They need safe and supportive communities where they can grow and mature. GSAs provide those kinds of safe spaces. They provide a place where they can learn not only who they are but also how to be a supportive community for other kids. They learn to care for and value the kid who is marginalized and the kid who needs a place to belong.

I would just remind the members across the way that the terms "GSA" and "QSA" involve the word "straight" as well. I mean, these are clubs for kids, and sometimes they're about just making connections with other kids.

Erin goes on:

Sadly, this is not always the case for families, and it is . . .

in Erin Phillips's words,

. . . reprehensible that the government is considering outing youth to their parents when they may not be ready.

That's the word from the chaplain at the University of Lethbridge, an Anglican minister down there.

I have another letter here, from Reverend Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum, who is the associate pastor at the Holy Spirit Lutheran church. I won't read their whole letter, but I will read some of it.

We've been blessed to serve the areas of Malmo and Lendrum for over 54 years, providing care and support to our members, friends, and neighbours. During this time we have come to centre our practices of worship and service around works of social justice and solidarity within both our community and the wider world. So much of what we hold dear as a community of faith has come under fire as of late by the UCP government. The right of LGBTQ2SIA-plus students to form and join GSAs without fear of being outed to their guardians, the rights of all Albertans to a fair and equal wage . . .

and so on and so forth.

They say:

We have taken to writing letters to the UCP government to express our grave concerns. As this is the case, I also wish to write a letter of support and encouragement for your efforts . . .

This is addressed to me.

. . . within the Legislature over the last few months to try to keep these movements alive. Not only have you all weathered the storm of a hard-fought election, but you've immediately taken up the fight for everyday Albertans. This member is of the Official Opposition. There have been so many long sessions as of late, stretching well into the early hours of the morning, during which you have uplifted the concerns of Albertans before the government. While I recognize that this is a part of the change your position as an MLA holds, these are long hours spent away from your families, friends, and communities of support. The work you are doing, while at times tiring, is so important. I know that over the next four years there may not be many "victories" due to the status of the majority UCP government. But please know that every time you stand for justice, every time you fight for workers' rights, every time you work to uphold the rights of LGBTQ2SIA-plus youth, every time you rise within the Chamber to raise your voice for the voiceless, we give thanks for you all. We are grateful for your tireless work and continue to hold you and our government in our prayers.

Sincerely,

Reverend Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum,

who is the associate pastor at Holy Spirit Lutheran church.

Obviously, there are a lot of open-hearted expressions of faith, Mr. Chair, that could inform this bill, but they don't.

Another aspect that could inform this bill and would mean that the government would be open to amending it is about a gentleman named Rick Fraser and his experience with his own son, that he spoke about at length in this Chamber, a former PC colleague of the members opposite. He spoke movingly and emotionally a couple of different times. He also spoke to me and to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview a couple of times privately about this matter. He's a good man, Rick Fraser, our former colleague. He was here for the right reasons. He was here to do what he felt was right, and good on him. I wish him all the best.

You know, I'll never forget him standing in this House and talking about the challenges of his son coming out to him. Rick and his wife provided a very supportive environment and a supportive household, and that was still really tough on him. He was duly elected by his constituents to be a Conservative in this House, and I have to wonder what he would be thinking or what he is thinking about this backslide that is contained within Bill 8 as we now discuss this matter in the House. I think of him often because he was, again, one of those kinds of Conservatives where we might disagree on certain matters having to do with economic policy and even some aspects of social policy, I'm quite certain, but that element of fundamental individual liberty and individual human rights that was protected under Bill 24 and is being eroded and jammed into reverse under Bill 8, Bill Hate, is regrettable. Indeed, I think this does a great disservice to some of the people who have honourably served this Chamber as Conservatives in the past.

I'll now bring some more voices from constituents. Here's a Lethbridge-East resident named Jack.

GSA's matter to me because of the impact I see it make in my community, the fact of providing a safe space for my peers and letting them get involved in a group where they feel they are appreciated, because many people don't share that same love and kindness. Letting people have a place to express themselves is so essential to protecting Albertans even if they love someone different from you. The LGBT community deserves to feel respected by all Albertans, and even though Bill 8 will be debated back and forth on the benefits and faults, at the end of the day, by passing this bill, the message that's sent is clear, that the lives of thousands and thousands of Albertans, every LGBT friend I have, feels hurt, left behind, disregarded by Bill 8. The message that this bill sends is loud and clear to every gay, lesbian, trans, and plus person I know. What it says is that they don't matter, that their lifestyle, which is different, is wrong, and that the UCP doesn't care about them, doesn't respect them, doesn't love them.

Jack goes on to say:

I'm sure many people will argue that that's not true, but the fact is that that's the message being sent. No Albertan should feel that way. No person should feel that way.

**4:10 a.m.**

Jack goes on to write:

Please stop Bill 8. Take a second to see the effect on the lives of people, not the political ramifications but the message the government is sending because it is painful and disrespectful to the LGBT Albertans that it's your job to represent.

That's Jack, who I think is still 17, and will be, most certainly, a voter in 2023.

I have a constituent here named Zane. Zane has taught me a tremendous amount with some feedback about Bill 8. On a personal level, I really want to thank Zane for everything that she's taught me. We're always learning about that journey for trans people, of transition, of acceptance, of, you know, so-called passing, for ensuring that you're living according to the gender that you feel you

were born with. Yeah, Zane is a wonderful human being, and this is what she has to say:

There have been numerous peer-reviewed academic studies on the positive effects of GSAs, QSAs on LGBTQ-plus youth as well as the general public. It is not hyperbole when the NDP states that GSAs, QSAs save lives. It's the truth. The truth is that when you get to start a GSA, QSA, it provides an opportunity for everyone to ask questions, wonder about gender, sexuality but, most importantly, break down the wall of the us-versus-them attitude.

This part she puts in a big box.

LGBTQ-plus Albertans pay taxes, have opinions, enjoy the wilderness, the very things that the UCP members like and do. We must protect the youth from uncaring families.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and happy Thursday to everyone. Of course, happy Thursday to all my hon. friends on this side of the House and in the UCP caucus. Many of them have travelled great distances to be here for this, what could be the final week, potentially, of the legislative session. We have worked some long hours this week and in the weeks before it. Of course, for all members, that means time away from our families. It's time away from our businesses, from volunteering, from community groups, from many of the things that bring us fulfillment in life. That's the sacrifice, of course, that we took on when we ran for public office, and we make that sacrifice in order to be part of something larger.

I think that our current Premier gave a speech to that effect not too long ago, in the past, but I do wonder if some of the members opposite, when the Premier isn't around or during those long hours on the highway, reflect on their role in this government, especially after last week, when the Government House Leader successfully argued that those members are not actually part of the government at all. I think that that's got to be demoralizing if you've travelled all the way from, say, Central Peace-Notley or Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. You might think that if they're not members of the government, they might enjoy some freedom to speak. But, no, they don't have a voice in this place beyond reading the badly written notes they're handed by the government. These members don't listen to debate on legislation since the government told them to plug their ears. They can't introduce their own guests.

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Chair, this is fascinating. Point of order. This is fascinating; it just doesn't really have anything to do with the legislation in front of us, as interesting as it really, really is.

**The Acting Chair:** Yes.

Please, Member, I'd ask you to speak to the bill.

**Mr. Carson:** Of course, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that. I will quickly get to my point here. I think it's important to recognize the debate that's happening here.

Anyway, we found ourselves not being able to introduce our own guests since the government stripped us of that century-old right.

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** Point of order.

**Mr. McIver:** At some point I would ask you, respectfully, to suggest to the hon. member that he address the legislation before the Assembly, please.

**Mr. Shepherd:** If I may, Mr. Chair, to the point of order. Generally within Committee of the Whole I believe that if you look at previous precedent and past practice, there's a fair amount of latitude that's allowed to members to expand on their thoughts on a piece of legislation. There's the opportunity to explore a number of directions as long as things do come around to the point. This is something that I know the Member for Calgary-Hays has personally exploited on many an occasion, and I respect that he may not be interested in listening to us tonight and may be interested in trying to perhaps suppress the free speech of members here. But I would suggest to him that perhaps our time would be best exercised, as in past practice, respecting that opportunity for members.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member.

Member for Edmonton-West Henday, I'd just ask you, for the benefit of those that are tuning in and may not know exactly what you've been talking about might be, to stick to the relevance of the bill so that we could figure out where we're at. Thank you.

**Mr. Carson:** Wonderful. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Considering some of the long-winded speeches I've heard over the last few weeks here, I think that I haven't gone too far off the mark.

Back to the point. Of course, we're discussing Bill 8 and the concerns that this opposition party has with that legislation and my concerns with the fact that this government – well, I suppose, not this government but the members that are part of the UCP caucus who are not being afforded the opportunity to speak unless it's been handed to them by the government. Of course, it is a real shame, Mr. Chair, that they aren't taking the opportunity to discuss this.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

This is really part of a bigger picture that we've seen once again, the fact that we've seen this legislation, Bill 8, come forward and that many questions have been asked not only by the opposition caucus but also by members of the media about, to quote the Minister of Education, finding balance in the current legislation. We're hoping to find out what that means, but really the Education minister nor any other member of the government or the UCP caucus has been able to properly explain or explain at all what they mean by finding that balance. The question has been raised by several members on this side of the House, what that actually means.

It's very concerning to see legislation come forward in this House where members of the caucus that is bringing this legislation forward are unwilling to speak to that legislation. We've seen it in amendments that have passed, even within the morning here. They're unwilling to speak to it at all, and I have grave concerns with that.

Of course, during the election our now Premier said, as has been brought up several times, that he will not get distracted by GSAs and other issues that voters aren't talking about. Once again, I'm very concerned that while our now Premier said that he would not get distracted, here we are in the First Session of our four-year term, and we're seeing legislation attacking the rights of the LGBTQ2S-plus community.

Now, once again I want to go back to the fact that members are not able to raise their voice on issues with this. We saw earlier the rights of members stripped away when introducing guests. We saw the rights of members or, I suppose, the ability of members to really make decisions. We saw it earlier today, where a member, the Member for Calgary-Falconridge, wanted to stand up and speak to an amendment that was put forward on this very bill, and their caucus whip told the member to be seated, which is very concerning for me, when we talk about respecting democracy, when a member

wants to speak to something and they're told to sit down, maybe because he didn't have the prepared notes handed to him. I'm not sure what the issue was there, but the fact is that it happened. It's very concerning to see that in the House. Madam Chair, that's gravely concerning to me, especially on such an important piece of legislation.

Really, just to get back to the point here, I mean, I remember when Bill 24 was introduced in this House by our NDP government and the conversation that happened around there. Of course, our members of the government supported Bill 24, recognizing that it was a step forward in the protection of GSAs and the strengthening of GSAs and QSAs, and all of the members opposite that were in I guess it was the Wildrose, I suppose, at the time – I don't know: Wildrose, UCP, same thing – voted against it. Very concerning that here we are again, and they're using the same line: well, we support GSAs and QSAs; we're just going to weaken the ability of students to form them. Very concerning for me.

Of course, we have the Minister of Children's Services, the minister of mental health, and I would like to hear from them how they think weakening the rights of children or the rights of youth to support and start GSAs is somehow furthering their agenda when we talk about protecting children and protecting the mental health of children, especially with the stats that I'm sure have been raised earlier in this debate.

4:20 a.m.

But I would like to focus on them just for a little while here. Once again, 33 per cent of the LGBTQ youth have attempted suicide in comparison to 7 per cent of youth in general, and I think I raised that very point in the Bill 24 debate. Over half of members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community, 47 per cent of males and 73 per cent of females, have thought about suicide. When we compare the situation of those in the LGBTQ community to those who aren't, we're seeing a picture here. Increasingly, studies are confirming that suicidal ideation and behaviour are disproportionately affecting and prevalent among LGBTQ members. Once again, I'm very concerned that we have ministers in this government that are put in charge of protecting the mental health of children, and they're willing to see the rights of the LGBTQ community eroded through this piece of legislation. Very concerning.

During the election we had multiple UCP candidates who came into the limelight because of the comments they've made or the thoughts that they've had towards the LGBTQ community. Some of those people made it into this House. They've been pretty quiet on this issue, I'll tell you. It would be interesting to hear them stand up and talk of how they think this is supporting the LGBTQ community. At the time that one of them stepped down, thankfully – thankfully, they're not here today – our Premier thanked the member for their selfless move to step down. No reprimand for what they had said about the LGBTQ community, just: thank you for your selfless work; we'll see you next time, I suppose. Maybe they'll run in the next election. But that's very concerning for me, and I think it's very concerning for the people in this community who are being affected by this piece of legislation, because they're seeing in this government a willingness to let their rights be eroded. That's very concerning for me.

Many members on this side of the House shared stories and letters from their community, and I do appreciate that because it's important to put faces and names to the people. I think that a big part of the misunderstanding here – unfortunately, we're legislating on a misunderstanding. But I'm not sure that some of these government members who are about to vote on this really, maybe, necessarily understand the issue. I don't know if they've never met somebody from the LGBTQ community, because we see a lot of

times that fear comes from the unknown, and fear comes from misunderstanding, and there might be some of that here. Unfortunately, it's going to see its way through legislation, and it's going to negatively affect people in this community. That's very concerning for me.

Once again, just thinking back to the Bill 24 debate, that took place under our NDP government, something that I remember quite often is a comment that was made by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, who is no longer in the House, of course. The member said something like, "Views have changed quite a bit over the last decade even." I made a comment back to him saying, "You know, if you're learning from people or if you're listening to people who are willing to take the human rights of another community and talk down about them, then you should be concerned about who you're learning from and who is teaching you." Once again, I think that that is an important point to make. If there are people out there in the community who are teaching you that it's wrong to identify differently than some other person or to love somebody that somebody thinks you shouldn't when it comes to LGBTQ, that's very concerning, and you should second-guess who is giving this information.

Now, I also want to raise a point. The Premier yesterday, I suppose, in question period raised the fact that when we raise concerns about funding going to private charter schools even though they weren't willing to recognize QSAs and GSAs – and our government had planned to pull funding from these schools, which were not willing to respect the human rights of this community. The Premier, as he does every time he's asked the question, pushes it off and puts some political spin on it, saying something along the lines of: well, we're going to continue funding them. So what he's saying is that he does not take the concerns of this community seriously, and he's willing to continue funding these. I imagine we'll see, potentially in the fall session, with a budget release, that he might even go further and start funding them even more. We're going to see the rights of the LGBTQ community taken away from them, and then we're going to give them more money, which is very concerning.

These discussions, of course, were not easy discussions for our government to have under Bill 24. It was just the right thing to do. Becoming a New Democrat in Alberta isn't the easiest thing to do. Obviously, I'm a little biased here, but I think it's the right thing to do. Of course, well, we can debate that all night, too.

Once again, it's very concerning that this Premier is willing to continue funding these schools who aren't willing to respect the human rights that should be given to this community and that have been enshrined in legislation to protect this community.

Now, once again, I truly don't understand, with a Premier who said during the election that legislating on social issues was the last thing that he wanted to do, how we made it to this place. Of course, the Education minister continues to say that this is about modernizing the Education Act or modernizing the education system, which, when you look through the legislation that's before us, is really quite clearly just an attack on the LGBTQ community and an attack on GSAs and QSAs. The minister still hasn't given us any clear indication of why they're doing this. I think that we can come to our own conclusions about the support in terms of volunteer capacity and money that came into their party. That money talks for this government, and they have some dues that they have to pay back, which, unfortunately, is going to work against the kids in our schools.

You know, I also brought up the fact that over the last four years I had the opportunity to represent Jasper Place high school. They were early adopters of GSAs, and it was an honour to go there with our former Premier, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, as well as the former Education minister, the Member for Edmonton-North

West, to share in their GSA and talk about Bill 24 at the time, which was being discussed and consulted upon, which really brings me to another point, the fact that this piece of legislation that's before us has had very little consultation if any at all. I would be very interested to find out what consultation the Education minister has done. I know that the question has been raised quite a few times, and we haven't, once again, gotten a very clear answer on that. Maybe you talked to a couple of teachers at a charter school or something.

That would be interesting to find out because the implications of this piece of legislation moving forward gravely concern me, and it concerns teachers across this province. Once again, as was stated in the Bill 24 debate and the Bill 10 debate and now this debate, teachers do not want the responsibility to have to choose whether to out a child or not, and they shouldn't have to have that responsibility. They really should not. A child should be able to choose when they decide to come out, if they decide to come out to their parents at all. Who knows? Maybe that just doesn't happen. Maybe that's something that they keep to themselves, which is unfortunate, if they do feel that way, but maybe that also can make them happy. But the fact is that that decision should be theirs and not a teacher's and not a parent's and not a school administrator's, and that's the bottom line.

The fact that we brought forward some very reasonable amendments – and I imagine we'll have some more here as the debate goes on. The fact that, for one, we're hearing very little debate from the government and the UCP caucus as a whole, very little debate on our amendments and on the bill itself, shows that maybe there's some concern. Maybe not, but I hope that there's some concern, because when I look at this piece of legislation, I think about how I might feel if I started eroding the rights of these vulnerable children in our schools. I think I might have a little trouble sleeping at night, to be honest, because it's our responsibility as legislators to raise all boats and to think about the people that are being harmed and how we can protect them. And here we are taking those rights away from them when it comes to ensuring that "gay" can be in the name of the GSA, ensuring that timely establishment of a GSA is done, which was voted down once already, of course, by this caucus.

**4:30 a.m.**

Of course, there are many other issues with this piece of legislation. When we look at talking about school board trustees being able to fire other school board trustees, that's very concerning. You know, people are elected democratically, and for school board trustees to unilaterally be able to throw somebody off the board because they aren't happy with them – imagine if that happened in this House. Imagine if the UCP government or, well, the front bench and the backbench decided with their majority mandate that: well, we don't like what the NDP is saying today, so instead of putting in earplugs, we're just going to throw one off the boat. I'm sure they would love to do that, but unfortunately that's not how democracy works.

**Ms Hoffman:** What if it happened to themselves?

**Mr. Carson:** Yeah. What if it happened to one of their own members? I mean, we've heard they're interested in recall legislation. We'll see how that goes now that they're in government.

It's very concerning that they think that school board trustees should be able to start throwing each other off. It would also create a lot of infighting, which is unfortunate because they were elected democratically, just like we were as well.

Once again, I do hope to hear more from the government front bench and the caucus behind them about why they're really supporting this because when I look at it, I don't see any good news here. I think that it's very concerning that the first thing this government goes after is the social issue of protecting students in GSAs and QSAs. There are still many questions about classroom improvement funds, about nutrition programs, things that are going to affect the health and wellness of children on top of this, on top of this erosion of their rights. On one hand, the government is saying, "Well, we're going to move fast to take their rights away," but on the other hand, they're going to move as slow as they want when we talk about funding vital, important programs for these students as well. A little bit of give and take, I suppose, from this government.

Madam Chair, I imagine I'm going to have a lot more time to speak to this piece of legislation tonight. I will just once again say that I'm very concerned about the conversation that has happened here or the lack of conversation from the government side of the House, the lack of answers from the Education minister and the Premier himself. You know, he also – I believe it was in question period earlier today – said: well, the NDP supported Bill 10. Well, yes. That's true. We supported Bill 10 because it was a small step forward. But the fact is that at the first chance we had, we moved forward to strengthen what was in Bill 10, of course, through a totally new piece of legislation. We strengthened it. So why would this government want to turn the clock back on that? It's very, very concerning.

You know, I also had the chance earlier to talk about my friend who asked me to share their story in the House about the fact that they didn't have a house that was welcoming . . .

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I'm very interested to hear the speeches given by my peers here on the opposition side of the House because I think there are lots of significant points that are made.

You know, along the way I've tried to join in and share some of the concerns from different constituencies that I represent in one way or another. That has included, of course, the students in my area of Edmonton-Rutherford but also indigenous voices around the province, who I often try to bring into the House just to make sure that there's at least some conversation and some concern about how this legislation or any other legislation may affect indigenous peoples. I sure would have appreciated it if at some point in the time that we are together debating this bill along with the other ones, someone on the government side of the House would address how this bill or other bills affect indigenous communities. I am sure they have some thoughts around that. It would just be nice to hear some points of view. We could have an exchange and perhaps one in which we would agree with each other substantively about the importance of representing the voice of indigenous people here in this House.

But, you know, I have spoken to those issues a number of times over the last few weeks. Today I indicated that I would be, as I spoke earlier, making a little bit of a shift in terms of my conversation. While others have spoken at great length about the GSAs, I haven't previously spent as much time on that. Tonight I wish to spend a little bit of time on that.

Previously I spoke about the perspective of myself as a social worker, having worked in the area of child abuse and neglect for many years, in fact, the majority of my 35 years as a social worker,

talking about how bills of this nature have a very serious effect for a small group of people but a group of people that I personally have devoted a significant portion of my career to working with and protecting. I feel that it's important that I do that while I'm in the House as well because, you know, when you're in a private practice, you have the opportunity to support people on a one-to-one basis, on an individual basis, which is extremely important because that's where we get our sense of social support from.

You know, as a PhD student at the university I did a significant amount of work around the area of social support. One of the things that we found in the research – and it's pretty consistent across various aspects of the research; that is, social support as it relates to a number of different issues, but my focus, of course, was on child abuse and neglect – is that there is a significant difference in outcomes for children when they have some form of social support given their lack of support in their family situation. This doesn't only apply to issues such as the existence or nonexistence of GSAs or even just around issues of sexual orientation but applies to a variety of dysfunctional concerns that may happen in a family such that there actually is a significant change in the outcomes, the statistics, that we worry about when a child has experienced abuse or neglect.

For example, while only about 7 or 8 per cent – and the research does vary in terms of the specific numbers, but I'll use that as a rough average; I'm prepared to be challenged on that to some degree – of children experience some form of abuse or neglect in their childhood, one of things that we do know is that if you have been abused as a child yourself, are one of that 7 or 8 per cent, the likelihood of you becoming an abuser jumps up to about 20, 21 per cent or so. So we know that the experiences of childhood become the teaching moments that lead to the ultimate outcome in terms of your adult behaviour. Thus, if you are abused as a child, you are more likely to become an abuser.

But it's not all bad news. My point is that it does raise the percentage of people who become abusers significantly, by about three times, approximately. You know, research always questions the actual numbers because there are many variables that need to be accounted for, but the trend is pretty clear that the likelihood of your becoming an abuser if you have been abused goes up significantly. For the sake of argument, let's use three times because I think that's reasonably defensible given the statistics.

*4:40 a.m.*

However, the thing I want to point out about that is that even if it is raised by that much, even if the structural impetus from your childhood experience does raise it that much, it's still important for us to remember that the vast majority of people who were abused as kids don't go on to abuse their own kids. Remember, I indicated that it only goes up to 21 per cent. It doesn't go up to 100 per cent, which actually tells us something. It tells us that the vast majority of people who are abused as kids do not become offenders themselves when they reach that age and have children of their own: 21 per cent might, but that tells me that some 79 per cent are not.

That became a very big focus of the research for a number of years. If having had that experience as a child tends to exacerbate the likelihood of your becoming an offender, then of course we want to pay attention to what the mechanism is that causes you to become an offender having experienced that kind of violation yourself. But it also led to the next question, or the obvious question: if you did have the experience and the vast majority – using the stats that I'm using right now, somewhere around 79 per cent – of people don't become offenders, there must have been something that stopped them from becoming an offender,

something that interfered with that draw, that pull that comes from the childhood experience.

Of course, that's a very interesting question because we wish to encourage whatever that is. We wish to, you know, find ways to structurally enhance that in our society because if we could shift that 79 per cent to 89 per cent or perhaps even 99 per cent, we could become very close to eliminating child abuse and neglect in our society, which is obviously a desirable outcome.

The research done on this has led in a number of different directions that have been very helpful for those of us who worked in the field in terms of making decisions about the things that we would do both as therapists, on the individual level, but also societally, on that more structural level, because, of course, the frustration that many of us experience in working with individuals, you know, one on one in a private practice such as my own, was that you weren't actually changing the underlying problem. You were helping that individual, which is a noble pursuit and the right thing to do for that individual, but it doesn't change the overall amount of abuse that happens in society. In looking at that question, what are the things that we can do?

One of the things that came out most strongly in terms of what actually prevents people from going from being abused to becoming an abuser was what the literature refers to as social support. The evidence is actually quite interesting because in much of the research they talk about the fact that it doesn't have to be the vast majority of the people in your life that support you, that help you to become part of that group of people that's able to overcome the personal experience of abuse and ensure that you don't move into an offending set of behaviours.

Even the presence of a single identifiable individual who was present to you and who stayed consistently in a relationship with you was enough to begin to have an effect. Now, of course, you know, if it's many people, it's much better, but in some of the research that my supervisor, for example, had been researching, some people were able to say: "There was this one teacher, there was an aunt, an uncle, there was a neighbour, there was a cousin, or someone who knew what was going on for me and who stayed in a relationship with me. That really helped me to go from being an abused child to being a nonabusive parent." We know that social support has a pretty powerful effect, and it's really important that we try to create that.

Now, there are a variety of ways in which we can try to create that kind of social support. There are incredible individuals out there – teachers, for example; church members are often cited; neighbours, extended relatives, all kinds of groups of people – who can come forward. It's wonderful when they do, and I praise them when they do step up and help us to transform what could have been a tragedy into a great success story. But because we know that that works, we should also be concerned about the fact that there is that 21 per cent of people, or some number, that don't seem to be receiving that kind of support, that for some reason don't get the kind of level of support that allows them to overcome the trauma of their own personal history and to move into a healthier place in society.

I think that the question of what we can do as a society to provide that for people who don't have it naturally or don't have someone who steps up for them – there are a variety of ways that that happens. There are organizations, wonderful ones like Big Brothers Big Sisters, for example, just off the top of my head, which step up every day to try to provide that kind of social support. I'm very proud to have worked with Big Brothers Big Sisters in providing services to children who are working with that agency and very proud to have spent many, many weekends meeting with young

people and helping them to make that transition and to give them the sense of social support that's necessary.

I'm very proud of Big Brothers Big Sisters here in Edmonton, who have particularly been reaching out to the LGBTQ2S-plus community to make sure that they have big brothers and big sisters who are either themselves part of the queer community or are very open and supportive of the queer community to match with children who are part of the queer community or who perhaps are even not necessarily at the place yet where they fully have come to the realization of their orientation but are questioning or exploring or concerned or just need reassurance. You know, I want to thank that agency. I want to thank Big Brothers Big Sisters for reaching out in that way.

Of course, again, it becomes one of those situations where, if you happen to be lucky and if you're in the right place and have the right kind of social worker or somebody else who says, "Hey, there's this organization out there that might be really good for you" and hooks you up and makes sure that you get that kind of support, then that's great. But the issue we have at hand is that that's not always readily available. Big Brothers Big Sisters struggles every single year with trying to find enough mentors – that is, big brothers or big sisters – to connect with young people. They just can't meet the need in the way that they would choose to meet the need, so there need to be other ways. There can't just be one mechanism of providing that level of social support that's necessary for young people.

This is where GSAs come in. GSAs come in because they provide a very specific kind of social support that allows young people to have a mechanism for dealing with trauma. It's not a clinical mechanism like therapy, like I provided for many years in my private practice. It's a social support mechanism, and it's wonderful because there's lots of evidence to indicate that social support, in fact, is one of the most effective mechanisms. We want to see that continue. We want to enhance that whenever possible.

#### *4:50 a.m.*

Because we can't rely on it happening by chance all the time in families or in other kinds of situations, it really behooves us to try to find a more structural way to provide opportunities for all students to have that level of social support, not just the ones that happen to have a great aunt or a great uncle or a good neighbour or a good church member or a good Girl Guide or Boy Scout leader or some other person. We want a structural way of ensuring that something is available to all students, not haphazard, not just for the lucky ones that happen to be, you know, in the right family circumstance.

That's what GSAs provide. They provide an opportunity for people to get that social support, which is good. We should celebrate that because we can say that research has actually demonstrated the veracity of that kind of intervention in people's lives, and when we have something like that, we want to encourage it, the same as we do when it comes to medicine, for example. If we know that chemotherapy helps people with cancer, of course we want to make sure that chemotherapy is available to everybody. That makes sense. If we know that insulin helps people with diabetes, of course we want to make sure that that's readily available to people so that it would save their lives.

It's very much the same argument that we have here with GSAs. We have learned something. The science, the research have demonstrated that it's effective. If we've learned something and we have the evidence to demonstrate that it isn't just, you know, a one-off story told by an individual that may or may not have underlying truth to it, then we should be using that kind of evidence to guide the decisions we make, to employ the lessons that we get from that kind of research to help to create a better world for people,

particularly those people whose natural families and extended systems have not been able to step up for them.

That's why I think it's important, from a social work perspective, that we create GSAs and ensure that they're structurally available, not just occasionally, that if you happen to be in the right school, if you happen to be in the right neighbourhood, then it's available to you. It should be available to all students so that all students can go from having been victimized to being healthy adults, which, you know, as I've indicated, seems to be one of the things that social support is very effective in doing, rather than them going from being victimized to being unhealthy adults.

Now, I want to just talk about my own son for a few moments. I have spoken to him about speaking about this in the House, and I have permission to do so. I just want to make sure that people are aware of that. I want to talk about the fact that he came from a family that is completely open to sexual orientation.

**The Chair:** Are there other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I do definitely want to speak to this bill, but I would be very keen to hear the member complete his story about his lived experience and his family if he would so choose.

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

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you. I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for giving me the opportunity to add a bit more to this conversation.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

The piece that I wanted to talk about in terms of my son is the fact that he has been fortunate in many ways, as I was, of course, in my own day, to come from a stable, middle-class family that, you know, truly loves each other. In fact, I'm happy to say to the House that I just celebrated my 25th wedding anniversary last night.

**Ms Hoffman:** Celebrated it here.

**Mr. Feehan:** Yes, I was here during that time, and I'm still married today.

I think that, like every other parent, I've got many faults, but I do feel like we were good enough parents, as the expression often goes, good enough to have done most of the things right enough that he had a lot of social support. Of course, in our family sexual orientation is a nonissue in the sense that it wasn't a concern at all for him. In fact, at one point I had a conversation with him after he came out, originally in junior high, and said to him, "Well, how many people know now?" That's sort of one of the things you discuss with gay children who come out. Who knows and who doesn't: that is always kind of one of the questions. He said to me, "Well, maybe about a hundred people or so."

In this conversation that I'm remembering, I said, "And how many of them rejected you or said something really horrible?" He said, "Zero," which was really, really quite amazing. I was shocked to hear that answer. I was expecting him to say something else. We are a large Catholic family, and we anticipated that there would be some people that might have a religious objection to it, but it turns out that none of them did. We're quite open and supportive of him and so on. I'm just trying to lay the picture here that he really has a fair amount of social support.

But I want to talk to you about the fact that it turned out that even in a family with that level of social support, being able to attend a GSA became a profound moment in his life and something that

really allowed him to do some things he couldn't do with his mom and dad no matter how much we love him, and we do. I think it's important – and parents need to understand that – that it wasn't that he was trying to hide anything from us when he went to the GSA. We found out about it. We heard about him going to his high school – his junior high didn't have one – Strathcona high school, on the south side of Edmonton here. At the beginning of the school year you go into the gym, and all the clubs have these tables set up around the outside. You can go and sign up for the drama club or the chess club or the sports clubs or whatever else you want to do.

One of the clubs that was there was the GSA. He came back that day talking about how he had sort of circled around the gym four times and couldn't quite go over to the table and found it really difficult, didn't know whether he wanted to do that or not and how hard it was for him. Then he eventually kind of went over and just sort of had a quick chat but then kind of got away because he didn't want people thinking he was too interested, you know, that kind of thing. I thought it was very interesting because he didn't say to us before he went to the gym that day: I'm going to go find out about the GSA. This is a conversation we had afterwards because he felt comfortable enough to come back and tell us about his nerve-racking experience of trying to put himself out there and join the GSA.

It was really incredible because once he joined the GSA, it became a pretty fundamental part of his high school career. In fact, he became the president of the Strathcona GSA and as part of that one day was here on the front steps of the Legislature, during the Bill 10 debate, speaking about his experience of being in the GSA. I thought it was very interesting that he still wanted to be part of the GSA even though he came from a basically supportive family, you know, with all our foibles. I know that. But there wasn't major rejection at home, and he still talked about how significant it was for him to be able to talk to other people who were actually in the community and had that experience. He could come home and talk to mom and dad and say, "I'm gay, and it means X, Y, or Z." We'd kind of look blankly at him from our heterosexual lives and say: "Oh. Okay." But we don't kind of get it on some level, right? We don't fully understand it. But he could go to the GSA and he could just talk, and other kids would go: "Yeah; me, too" or "Yeah; I get that" and talk about how weird it is and about some of the strange things that happened.

*5:00 a.m.*

You know, we had this kind of funny little thing happen in junior high. He was a pretty good-looking little guy in junior high and would often have young women come up and kind of flirt with him, as junior high students often do with each other, and he would just kind of look at them and not react and go away. They became a little annoyed at him that he wouldn't respond to their attempts to initiate a relationship. At the time he didn't even understand why, but he just wasn't interested. It just didn't happen for him at all. He didn't fully understand it because he also hadn't really had a serious attraction to another male either. What was happening, though, was that he was feeling some ostracization from his peers because they couldn't figure out why he wouldn't react to the natural flirtations that go on in junior high. He could talk to his parents about that, but we don't understand that. We don't live that experience.

But he can go to the GSA and he can have that kind of experience, and he can talk to other kids and say: it's just weird because until I really got to understand who I was and what it was that motivated me, I didn't understand the reactions I was getting from my peers. It wasn't even because they were being bad or terrible but because it just set him apart. He had a sense that there was a wall, that there was a block between his experience and the experience of the

majority of the students in his school. Being able to talk with people who are not on the other side of the wall, who don't have that barrier of, "I don't know what you're talking about, son," I think is important. It actually became something that was incredibly important for him as he moved forward. That sense of social support has lasted with him to this day. Some of the friendships he made in his GSA, as for many of us in the various things that we do in our junior high and high school, have lasted with him for the whole time of his life till now.

He is now somebody who can really clearly articulate more about his experiences in such a way that he's actually able to help other people. One of the things I noticed was that by the time he became the president of the GSA in grade 12 I think it was, he himself had learned a lot from the supports that he received from other people and, as a result, was then able to develop a set of skills that allowed him to be a supporter. So here we had this circumstance where a child who could have been quite devastated by some of the reactions of his peers or other people in his family or in his world instead had an opportunity to be in a place that was safe enough and supportive enough that he used it as an opportunity to actually engage in skill development, something that's really positive, something that he's going to take with him the rest of his life, where he's able to reach out.

I can tell you that some of the stories that he brought home from the GSA about some of the other students' experience were horrendous. You know, I'm always tempted as a social worker to actually go into some of these stories and tell them in detail in hopes that that would trigger something for you, but I also don't feel they're my stories to tell. I guess that's a big part of it. Also, I don't want to sound like I'm trying to force some emotional reaction here. I just want people to understand that it's really important that people have that kind of level of support.

One of the other things that I thought was very interesting around that particular GSA and my son's experiences is that when I was first entering politics, I happened to knock on a door, and a gentleman came out and said to me on the doorstep: "Do you have a son who went to this school?" "Yeah." "Was he the president of the GSA?" I said yeah. He said, "I want to tell you how important that GSA is to my children; thank you for raising such a great son," which I immediately passed on to him. Proud papa.

What I thought was interesting was that this man said: neither of my two children is gay, but both of them have disabilities which identify them as other in the school system. One child had Tourette's syndrome, which causes uncontrolled utterances to occur. Of course, that sets you off in the school, when all of a sudden in the middle of a class you say things. I know the classic is swearing, but it's actually not true. Tourette's can be a variety of sounds or noises or utterances. He talked about how both of his children had identifiable issues that set them apart in the school and that neither of them had a place to go. There is no Tourette's syndrome club at the school because, you know, there couldn't possibly be. What they both knew, apparently, was that they could go to the GSA, and they would still be accepted, that the understanding of otherness, of being separated, of being thought of as different would be the same even if the reason for that otherness was different.

I think there are some profoundly wonderful things there, and I was very pleased as a father to be stopped on the doorstep and have somebody tell me about how important the GSAs had been to their children, who were not in fact gay.

It really speaks to the research that we've seen that says that GSAs don't just help the kids who are gay in the school. They actually have a transformative effect on the school itself, on the school community itself. At the schools in which there are GSAs,

we know that the suicides amongst students in general go down, not just amongst gay students. That's got to be a desirable outcome. That's got to be something that we want to pursue. If the GSAs can be that place where kids who are struggling with a feeling of otherness, of being different can go and receive the social support that we know from research and that, of course, many of us know from our lived experience actually has the effect of transforming what could have been a traumatic experience to a growth-inducing, mentorship-producing experience, it seems to me that that's got to be something we want to support, not something we want to undermine.

There's my plea to the government side of the House. Can we be part of doing that? Can we be part of creating a society for even those people who do not have all the lucky things in life that some of us have: the supportive families, you know, the physical well-being, the good physical and mental health? Can we be part of ensuring that truly everyone, no matter their background, will have the chance and the opportunity to overcome the struggles or the barriers that have been put in their way and to succeed in our society and become themselves part of healthy families raising healthy children? That's a pretty noble pursuit and one I'd certainly like to see this government supporting.

I'll wrap up my comments on that at this time, but I'd like to thank you all for indulging me in an opportunity to be a proud papa for a little while and to talk about my incredible child. I would ask your support in helping to give other kids the opportunity to also have that wonderful moment in their life.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member.

Are there other members wishing to speak to the bill? Go ahead, Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much. Thank you so much, colleague, for sharing so thoughtfully. I have been thinking about this book that I've had at home, and I thought: oh, shoot; it would be so appropriate to read tonight. Then, of course, I went on Kindle, and it's available. So I purchased a book, and I thought I'd read it to us. It directly relates to the bill that we're considering here. It's called *Piggy Bunny*. It's by Rachel Vail. It's a children's book. I won't show you the pictures – I'm not using a prop – but I will read the text.

**5:10 a.m.**

Liam was just like all the other piglets except for one thing. All the other piglets wanted to grow up to be pigs. Liam wanted to be the Easter Bunny. Liam tried to practise hopping, he tried to enjoy eating salad, and he tried to deliver eggs. "The Easter Bunny?" said Liam's big brother. "Seriously?" "Yes," said Liam. "You are a piglet," said Liam's sister. "Deal with it." "I am dealing with it," said Liam. Liam was dealing with it by trying to practise hopping and trying to enjoy salad and trying to deliver eggs. "You are a terrific piglet," said Liam's mom. "We love your squiggly tail and your little black eyes and your snouty nose and your adorable triangular ears." "You are perfect," said Liam's dad, "just exactly the way you are." "Just exactly the way I am," said Liam, "as a piglet who is going to grow up to be the Easter Bunny." "Do we even believe in the Easter Bunny?" asked Liam's little sister. "Um," said Liam's dad, "we are more of a believe-in-oinking kind of family." "I believe in the Easter Bunny," said Liam.

When Liam's grandparents came to visit, everybody said, "Oink, oink, oink, oink, oink, oink," everybody except Liam. Liam said: "Hello. My name is Liam, and I'll be your Easter Bunny." "Bunny?" asked Liam's grandpa. "Did this piglet just say he's the Easter Bunny?" "The Easter Bunny," said Liam.

“Oh,” said Grandpa. “He doesn’t look like a bunny to me,” said one of the neighbours. All the pigs and piglets stared at Liam, and he didn’t look like a bunny to any of them. “Of course he doesn’t look like a bunny,” said Liam’s dad. “He looks like a perfect piglet.” “And he doesn’t have to try to be anything else,” said Liam’s mom. “He’s our piglet, and we love him.” Liam felt loved, but he also felt sad. Everybody was sure he would never be the Easter Bunny. Liam knew that they were wrong, but he wondered a little bit: “What if they were right?” Liam sighed. “This is the kind of problem,” he said, “that’s called heartbreaking.”

“Baloney,” said Liam’s grandpa. “They just all have the imagination the size of a kumquat, the whole lot of them.” So his grandma shook her large head and said, “Go put on your Easter Bunny suit, Liam, then they’ll all see.” Liam blinked his little black eyes and said, “But, Grandma, I don’t have an Easter Bunny suit.” Liam’s grandpa smiled gently. “This is the kind of problem,” he whispered, “that’s called fixable.” So Liam hopped around with his grandparents, with his triangular ears twitching with excitement. “You know how to make an Easter Bunny suit?” he asked them. “Absolutely not,” said Grandma. “We’ll order one on the Internet.”

While he waited for his Easter Bunny suit to arrive, Liam practised hopping and enjoying salad and even delivering eggs, and he got pretty good, though salad remained a bit of a challenge. When his suit finally arrived, Liam tried it on. It was a bit tight in some places and way too big in others, and one of the long bunny ears had trouble standing up straight even after Grandma fiddled with the wire that was inside it. Also, it was itchy. Liam looked in the mirror. He didn’t notice the string hanging down in front of his snout, the wobbly ear, the too-long sleeves, or the seam coming loose a little bit around his belly, and he even stopped noticing the itch because what he saw in the mirror looking back at him was Liam the Easter Bunny.

**The Acting Chair:** Member, I’d like to stop you temporarily. We’re really enjoying the story, but I’d like to hear your own remarks on Bill 8, please, if you could.

**Ms Hoffman:** There are literally two pages left, and they do relate directly to the story.

**The Acting Chair:** Have you got copyright permission to read the whole book into the record?

**Ms Hoffman:** I gave credit to the author. I’m sure she’d be happy. Liam smiled and whispered, “Yes.” Off he hopped and everyone believed in him.

I’ve read it to some of the kids in my life, and I usually ask them what they think the story means. Some of them say that it means you should eat your vegetables, you know, try to eat salad and maybe good things will come. Some of them say that it reminds them of how their parents want them to become doctors and lawyers, and they want to become artists. One little girl, when I read it to her, said: it makes me think about people who are trans. Everyone, I think, can find a story that relates back: feeling like you are one thing, your family loving you but not knowing how to help you. The point of this is that even though the family loved him and they said, “We love you just exactly the way you are,” it still hurt. It still hurt because the way he was wasn’t the way the world saw him. The way he was didn’t align with the body that he was in or the person he felt he was.

I think that when we are talking about stories like this and how – certainly, I have no doubt that the parents in this story and most parents love their children deeply, but there can still be harm that’s caused when we don’t accept or know how to accept people for who they actually feel they are, not just when who they are on the outside

matches our hopes and dreams for them. I think that that story relates a bit to what the Member for Edmonton–Rutherford just said. I think that it goes back to the point that sometimes it’s important to have structures and supports in place to ensure that you are in a place that’s going to support you in being and achieving what you need to achieve.

I’ve talked a little bit about my time on the Edmonton public school board. I want to tell one more anecdote before I share some more words from other people. [interjection] Yeah. Okay. I won’t read any more stories, but I’ll share more letters. The anecdote I want to tell was about being at a school board meeting when we were considering our LGBTQ-inclusive policies to ensure that all staff, students, and families had the ability to come into our schools and feel safe, respected, and like they belonged. “Everyone’s in, and everyone contributes” was one of the tag lines that we tried to use. Everyone succeeds: that’s the other part, too. How do you create an environment for that, where everyone’s in, everyone contributes, and everyone succeeds, when people aren’t welcome to come as they are?

One of the moms who came didn’t have a child that I know of who identified as LGBTQ, but she talked about how her goal for her kids is that they be able to come to school, hang up their coat, and do math without having to worry about a bunch of other stuff going on in their lives, without having to worry about being harassed when they walked down a hallway, without having to worry about – maybe the mom was gay; who knows, right? – her kids feeling shame or discrimination. Her goal for her child and for every child in our district was that they be able to come to school, hang up their coat, and do their work.

When I talk to students at farewells – and I’ve been at a number of them recently, a grade 9 farewell last week that really stood out and a number of grade 6 farewells, too – I think about the kids who go to school and have so many other things going on in their lives. We often say: in the real world blah, blah, blah. But, like, a lot of the things our kids are dealing with are so real, and their worlds are so complex.

I was thinking about one of the students who spoke at a grade 9 celebration last week. When she was up at the mic, she and the person she was with said very lovely things that they’d scripted out ahead of time. When she got to the end of her formal remarks, she stopped, and she said, “I just want to tell you – I’m not supposed to say this – that I’m so proud of myself today.” A few people yelled, “You should be,” you know, things like that. She said: “I know that it’s not supposed to be a big deal, finishing grade 9, but on the reserve I grew up on, most kids dropped out by the end of grade 3. When I started going to school, I thought that this is a place I’ll be for a little while, and it’s not a place I’ll finish. Here I am finishing grade 9, and I know I can finish grade 12. I feel like I’m on the right track, and I really want to thank everyone for the decisions that they made to help me get to where I am today. I’m really proud of myself.”

It was really lovely to hear her share such a sense of pride with her whole school community, and they were certainly very proud of her. A lot of the kids in that school have a lot of real-life stuff going on, and they all deserve an opportunity to go to school, hang up their coat, do math, and not worry about life. Worry about school. Worry about learning. That should be the goal, I think, for all of us: how do we create a culture where everyone can do their job without fear of harassment, intimidation, how it’s going to impact them outside of school as well, and how their life could be impacted by things beyond their own control.

**5:20 a.m.**

I’m going to go back to another letter that I received. This one was from Theresa Miranda, who lives in Calgary. Theresa says:

There was no GSA at my junior high when I started dating Amy.

The whole school knew and [they knew] quickly.

We had our close friends and a few teachers who were clearly supportive but it was clear we made people uncomfortable.

We had a student in the middle of class behind us whispering “faggot” until my girlfriend cried.

The teacher . . . was supportive of me [and] asked me to step out of the classroom before I took any action.

She said she would bring it up with the principal of course the principal simply told him not to do it again and of course it happened again.

[So] the students see that teachers don't respect gay students they [don't] respect gay students either in my experience at least.

Very lucky it never got violent or dangerous.

There was another incident that I want to tell you about because, again, I think it came from people trying to do something good, but I think it caused grave harm. That was when I was talking to students who went to J.H. Picard here in Edmonton, a great French immersion Catholic school. They talked about how there was one student who came out, and a lot of the girls were excited to have a gay boyfriend at school. They surrounded themselves with him. They were very keen. They watched *Queer Eye*, and they were keen on helping him be the best gay he possibly could. This is the kids telling me this story. They said: “You know, we really need to work on your fashion. Let's take you shopping. Let's buy you cute clothes. Let's get you a haircut, and let's do all these things to your appearance.” There wasn't a GSA at this school, but these girls surrounded him. They surrounded him, and they tried to help him be who he was.

What it did actually is that he developed an eating disorder because he didn't think he was skinny enough to be a hot gay. That's one of the things that he learned from his peers, who certainly weren't trying to hurt him in any way. They were trying to be supportive, but they didn't have the skills to be able to know how to help him be who he was in the skin he had, because what they were doing they took from pop culture. They tried to surround him with love and show him a way that he could live this life, and he developed a serious eating disorder. It caused a lot of damage to his physical and psychological body as well, of course.

These are some of the things that can be easily addressed that are less dramatic than some of the ones we raised earlier. We talked about homelessness. We talked about suicide. Certainly, an eating disorder is very serious as well, but if there would have been a teacher working with these awesome girls who were working with this awesome guy who was figuring out how to be the best gay he could be, he may very well have been healthier at the end of the day instead of judging and treating himself in a way that was harmful.

It's still, I think, important for us to consider how it is that when somebody wakes up and they say, “I'm a pig who's going to be the Easter Bunny,” we don't laugh or dismiss or judge. We don't try to convince them that they're not who they say they are. We just say: I love you, and I'm here to support you. So those kids, again, in Calgary: you are loved, you are valued, and we will fight to keep you safe. All they're asking for is for this government not to move things backwards. They're not even asking for big progress moving forward.

I know that there were some members who – the minister for culture, I know, attended the first rural GSA summit, that was held in Strathmore last year. I was there as well. It was pretty amazing. There were somewhere between 100 and 200 kids, probably, from all rural ridings throughout Alberta. Just being in the same room, being together, and having an opportunity to wear their school sweaters with pride and be in an event that was focused on pride,

not shame, was really powerful, to be able to participate in it. They talked about the history of how the GSA legislation came to be. Those kids, those 200 kids in that room, definitely were well aware of the voting records of the MLAs who voted against Bill 24 or chose to leave the House when Bill 24 came up. They will be watching again.

I know that sometimes we think: “Well, it's a long time. Four years is a long time for a term.” I'll tell you from my own personal experience that four years goes by incredibly quickly, and four years means 14-year-olds will be 18-year-olds, and 18-year-olds will remember. They will remember the kinds of policies that were made in these early days and the implications they had on them. I think they will remember that their schools became less safe places. I think they will remember the jeopardy of funding for their schools.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

I think they will remember that \$2 per hour got taken away from them. The Member for Lethbridge-West and I were talking about: usually you see teenagers rummaging around change dishes because they're taking the toonies. It's not because they're watching somebody else come in and take their toonies. How backwards, that here we are in this First Session of the 30th Legislature, and it seems like there's a lot of obsession with kids. I wouldn't say that it's a healthy obsession. I'd say that it's damaging, and I think it's going to have a harmful impact.

Again, interesting timing, with a motion being voted on yesterday around conscience rights votes and being able to vote with conscience. I know that when I read that book, I did it with conscience and that when I read that letter, I did it with conscience. Certainly, when it comes to having to make decisions about this legislation, it weighs heavily on my conscience. I think that there is going to be a time, probably not too far in the future, where we are all asked to answer for the decisions we make in this place, maybe when you go home, eventually, whenever that might be.

I think that this is a very important and serious topic for us to consider. I wish that this was about updating and modernizing the education system. I really wish it was, but this in no way is. Bill Hate is about going back in time. I shouldn't be surprised. I know that the Premier, when he first became leader, did the *Sun* 20 questions. I know that when he was asked, “If you had one superpower, what would it be?” he said, “The ability to go back in time.” Time travel I get. It'd be cool to jump around and see what things were like. The ability to fly: I totally get that one. I would love to be able to do that. The ability to hold my breath as long as necessary and, like, scuba dive without worrying about my lungs exploding or having to run out of air: that'd be pretty awesome. But going back in time? Not my number one superpower.

No. I think it's important that we move forward. I think it's important that we move forward, and as I said before with that principal who talked to me about her first day in the staff room, seeing a teacher with a cigarette hanging out of their mouth, giving a kid the strap, I don't want to move back. I want to move forward. I want to keep protecting kids. I want to keep them alive. I want to make sure that we do more than just tell them that it gets better. I want to make a better world for them. I think we did a lot of that over the last four years.

We're just saying: let's not undo that. Let's not undo that. Let's help these families that have talked about the positive differences that having a GSA has made on them, continue to do that work around the province. Let's help those staff members and schools who say: I'm okay with hosting a club, but I don't know what to do. Let's make sure they get the resources so that they know what they can do. Some good examples: watch videos, eat pizza, and make

Post-its that say positive, affirming things. You are beautiful, equity is something we aspire for, equality is a good thing: these are some of the Post-it Notes that I've seen put around schools because of GSAs.

Oh, I just remembered another one. Right after we passed our policy, I had a student come up to me and say: I'm so glad you passed your policy. That student was at school in their cafeteria, and they pulled out their pride flag, and they plopped it down in the middle of the table. They had a little thing of clay or Fun-Tak or whatever it is on the table, and they put a little, tiny – you know the ones that say “winners” on the bottom that you get for free at the parade? They put it on the table. It was a table where most of the queer kids at school ate their lunch. And the lunch lady came over and said, “You have to take that down.” The kids said: “No, we don't. No, we don't. Our board passed a policy. We can do this. We can have a flag up and eat lunch.” Because we passed a policy, which is what we do here – we pass laws – that said you are loved, you are respected, and we will keep you safe, they felt confident enough to keep up a flag. The lunch lady had a conversation with the administration and then later went back and apologized to the kids and said: “Yeah. That's fine. Make sure that it doesn't turn into a rowdy party in here, but of course you can have your flag up.”

Little symbols like that are very powerful. I can tell you that a lot of kids, when they walk into a classroom, look to see if their teacher has a safe and caring poster up or not. They look to see: is there that heart and the rainbow colours up or not? Is this a place where I can feel a little bit safer? A lot of kids who aren't gay look for those signs, too.

5:30 a.m.

**The Chair:** Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill?

Sorry. Actually, before that, hon. members, just a reminder to table those letters being read in the House at your earliest possible convenience.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise again. It feels like I just did it an hour or so ago. You know, when I last rose in this House, I shared the words of a parent and an educator and shared her own experiences with just being an ally and being someone who wants the best for her students and for her family. I reiterated to this House the importance of heeding those voices. As I've noted many times here in this Chamber, GSAs aren't just for students. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford shared a really personal story, and he talked about how far-reaching the impact was of his own son being the president of a GSA. GSAs support teachers. They support school staff. They support allies. They support the entire school community.

As I've shared many times in this House, I think it's really important that as legislators we take the time to amplify the voices of those who aren't necessarily being heard, those folks who are reaching out to us. As I said earlier, I've had countless young people reach out to me, in some cases asking for anonymity, in other cases asking for their stories and their names to be shared. I don't take it lightly that we have an opportunity in this House to pass along their concerns, to pass along their stories.

I want to start by sharing the voice of another young person, of a student. These words are real, these words are true, and I found them tough to read. This was shared with me on Instagram just last week. He says: hello there.

I'm very grateful that people like you exist! As a gay youth individual myself, I am thankful to be surrounded in an accepting environment and I do believe that this is due to GSA's that run in

my school, as well as other schools that my friends attend. It is terrifying to see that [the Premier] has introduced Bill 8, considering that I have not come out to my parents yet. It's frustrating to know that [the Premier] (most likely) does not understand the fear of coming out. As a gay high school student, I feel that GSA's provide a welcoming atmosphere not only for the LGBTQ+ individuals, but to anyone because GSA's can be a [symbol] of acceptance towards individuals who may be different in age, race, gender, [and so on].

I'm just going to interrupt his thoughts for a minute to echo what my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, the example of young people with different abilities. He talked about a young person with Tourette's who found that the GSA was a safe space for him to be and just that opportunity to bring together so many young people with different stories, different backgrounds and to have a safe place to share all those stories.

He goes on to say:

It warms my heart to see individuals like you, who represent the LGBTQ+ community, fight for what is right because to this day, homophobia, transphobia, and prejudice towards [our community] still exists. No one deserves to receive such hate from others.

He says:

... I'd also like to mention that there are times [that] my parents make some sort of homo/transphobic comments (I haven't come out to them yet), it always hurts my heart and always makes me sad and puts me in a state of stress – the stress that makes me worry on how I will come out, how things will change for me, and such. It always brings me joy and happiness when I know that GSA's exist because I know that there will always be a safe place where I, along with LGBTQ+ individuals (and even straight people!), can freely discuss topics related to [our community].

That's hard. It's hard to read. I just think about this young person's stress that he's dealing with right now, this fear that weighs on him, every moment, of being outed. He hasn't come out to his parents yet, yet he has to hear regularly homophobic and transphobic comments. What a burden for a young person to have to bear.

He points out how fortunate he is that he has access to a GSA. For him, it's an opportunity to escape the hell that he's living in at home. He can't say anything to his parents. He doesn't feel like he's in a place to call them out for their language. He doesn't know how they'll react if he is accidentally outed. The GSA offers a true safe space for him, where he can be himself, where he, as he says, finds joy, where he knows that there's no judgment, no fear of being ridiculed like there is when he's at home. As he points out, it's not just a safe space for gay people but for allies and for straight people.

I liked what my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said about young people knowing that there are teachers and that there are spaces in their school that they can go to. She mentioned, you know, that a lot of teachers will have welcoming signs that it's a safe space, and that's just so important for someone like this. We do know – and I've shared examples already – that even in school environments there are teachers that some young people know that they can't turn to. They know that there are spaces in their school that aren't safe for them to be themselves.

I want to share another story. This one is from Jess, and she said that I could share her name. This one came via Twitter. She said:

I never really had an experience with GSAs in high school. In 2009, I moved to ... a very conservative town, and didn't figure out that I wasn't straight until grade 12. I had no idea GSAs existed. I have no idea if my high school had one (though I [really] doubt it because of [how conservative it was]), and I [sure] feel like I would have benefitted from them. I was viewed as the strange lesbian in high school, and I was the victim of a lot of targeted bullying and ridicule. I didn't necessarily hide my

identity, but I did go back and forth between labels because I wasn't properly educated or informed on my identity. At 24, I'm still figuring [things] out . . . and not only do I think GSAs are important for the protection of LGBTQIAP+ students, but I believe it's important for queer kids to be educated on identities and have a sense of community, to have people that share similar struggles. I think that GSAs are important and are way too often demonized, because spaces for queer people, even queer youth, are often sexualized. I think this is detrimental to kids and their protection, and cultivating and fighting for these spaces is something that's really important to me. I want queer kids to have the opportunities in high school that I didn't get to have.

There are a couple of really important things that I want to touch on in her comments. You know, I too grew up in a rural community. I grew up in Barrhead, Alberta. I wasn't out. Actually, I wasn't even really struggling with my identity when I was in high school although maybe, looking back, there were some indicators. I do know, as I think back, that there was one person who was trans. The treatment that she received in our school, because it was so different – it was odd; it was strange; it was the unknown; it was the other. She was treated terribly. When I think back, I think: "Oh, gosh. Again, I wish I would have had the courage or, I guess, the foresight to have been a voice in support of her." But it was a lot easier, especially in a small town, where being different wasn't really an option, to just go with the crowd. And Jess shares a similar story there.

5:40 a.m.

Another piece that resonates with me in her thoughts is that she says, "At 24, I'm still figuring [things] out." She's an adult, and she's still struggling with identity, with label. You know, this resonates so much with me because I was still struggling with my own identity into even my late 20s. As any member of the community knows, these struggles continue even when you're out and when you're an adult who's fully comfortable with your sexuality.

I still get questions about my sexuality, about my identity, about my gender even. It's not really anyone's business, but it still does happen. Right? I get nonsense all the time online, you know, folks commenting on my gender and my appearance. There are times that it can be hard. Mostly I've learned to let it go and ignore most of the trolls, but I'm also an adult who is comfortable with who I am.

**Ms Hoffman:** You signed up for this job.

**Member Irwin:** Right. I signed up for this job. I signed up to be a public figure.

I just got another awful Twitter DM that I can't even read to you because it's laced with vulgar language, but I can laugh because I know it's not a reflection on me. A lot of times when I do respond – I know I'm not supposed to feed the trolls – I reach out with love because in many cases these are real people. These are real people. They're not trolls. In one case there's an elderly couple in north Edmonton who are two of the worst trolls. They are real people, and when I don't hear from them for a while, I worry about them. They're always commenting on me and on the fact that I'm always focused on LGBTQ issues.

Again, my point in sharing all this is that I'm an adult. I've struggled with this. I've wrestled with this. It was hard. I dealt with a lot of challenges, as I've shared in this House, but we can't say the same for a lot of young people who are not only experiencing bullying online, toxic online behaviour, but they're also feeling the pain in their school environment and, in the case of the other fellow, his story that I shared, at home as well. I can't imagine being a young queer person right now who's getting bombarded on all these

different fronts. As my colleagues have shared tonight – this morning, whatever time it is – no wonder the statistics are staggering when it comes to LGBTQ suicide and rates of mental health struggles.

Again, I ache for those young people who aren't where I'm at and who aren't able to access any sort of space where they can, you know, access the tools. As Jess shares in her comments, she wishes that she'd been able to have access to the language and just tools to be able to navigate the difficult situations that she was going through. GSAs provide that. What a great resource for young people to access various resources so that they can have those conversations. Then, of course, it has a ripple effect throughout the school community when you see that poster, when you see a pamphlet that explains what it means to be a member of the community, for instance.

We can, you know, tell these kids that it'll get better, that it's just a tough time in their lives, but when you're in that moment – again, I know it first-hand – when you're struggling every second, platitudes don't help. Platitudes don't help. Tangible supports are what matter, having that loving, open teacher, having that room where you can go and eat pizza and you can talk about the issues that you're facing at home or elsewhere. What do those supports look like? Those supports look like fully inclusive GSAs.

Here's another story. This one is from Krystal, who gave permission, again, to share her name. She says – and I appreciate her saying this – that she wants to start by acknowledging that everyone who's in the Legislature, she believes, is trying to do the best that they can with what they know, both the government and the Official Opposition. She says:

I just hope my perspective can lend itself to a more understanding lens everyone can hear. As a queer person, who can easily pass as heterosexual, I have to out myself over and over. I'm lucky to have the resiliency to do that, but it doesn't come without caution. I never had a GSA when I was younger. I imagine that if I did, today I would be able to live my most authentic life.

I love that language, "my most authentic life."

If I imagine the experience of young people today, they are met with higher pressure for competition and more severe bullying, both of which lead to more severe mental health issues. I am an instructor for Mental Health First Aid and consistently when we discuss suicide, students ask me how to better help LGBTQ youth. This includes my work with Cornerstone Counselling, [which is] a Christian based counselling centre and my friends, [who are] a group of pastors with the Seventh Day Adventist religion.

She says:

I don't know what the right answer is for GSA's, but I do know that Bill 8 can do better. I don't only use my own experience as a queer person to tell me that. I listen. I listen to kids who I work with. I listen to experts in the field. I read documents like the recommendations from the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and hear what their research concluded . . . Protecting GSA's and the identity of children who participate in them does more than save lives. They help children troubleshoot who they are, learn how to navigate difficult conversations such as talking to their parents, and teaches them about the power of community. I didn't have a GSA, and it's taken me 31 years to start to figure out some of those things. Give children a chance to do this sooner, rather than later. I ask that you . . . use professional humility when making this decision.

Wow. From Krystal's comments I take a few things: the power of listening not just to kids but to experts, although I'd say that a lot of the time the kids are the experts, right? They are the ones that are experiencing this day in and day out. She talks about research, the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, the large body of research that exists. We've got folks here in our own city who are experts on

studying sexual minority youth and have been in the field for a long time. Read some of that literature, that talks about the transformative power of GSAs and shows the data that they do in fact save lives.

What also is interesting here is that, you know, she talks about navigating, again, being given the tools to navigate difficult conversations and set you up for success later in life. So think about the longer lasting impacts of GSAs, right? We have students in junior high, and if they've got access to such robust supports at the age of 12, imagine how well equipped they are as they head into later years of junior high and then into high school.

I want to echo another comment that she says here. She says, just like the previous story that I shared, "I didn't have a GSA, and it's taken me 31 years to start to figure out some of those things." Again, another person who is an adult and is still grappling with her own identity and with addressing some of her own struggles in the past. And her point about being able to live her "most authentic life": I mean, so many mental health struggles, when you are a member of the LGBTQ community, come from that disconnect of not being able to be true to yourself, not being able to live your own life.

I think back to some of my hardest times, where, yeah, you felt like you were always having to hide. You had to be careful who you said what to, and you kind of had to trace the conversations that you had. It's an awful place to be. I was fortunate because ultimately I had a lot of supportive people in my life. My family was generally okay with it, and my friends were as well. Of course, there were some that weren't, but with them, I look to them with love and with empathy and try to help them get to that place of acceptance and understanding.

As I end here, I just, again, want us to really consider the voices of those experts, students, young people. To echo comments prior, we've talked about conscience rights and the ability to vote according to conscience, so I ask the members opposite to consider this as we move forward with some amendments on Bill 8 that will be forthcoming. Yeah, think about the message that you want to send to your constituents and to the province.

5:50 a.m.

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise again and continue to speak to, in particular, the aspects of Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, that are looking to make adjustments, to put it politely, to the protections that have been put in place for LGBTQ youth in our province, their ability to request and form a gay-straight or queer-straight alliance, and to participate in a GSA or QSA safely.

This is all part of a larger discussion, Madam Chair, a progression that we've been working to make as a society. In my previous opportunities to speak to this bill, I've been pretty clear in outlining where this is coming from, and it's been pretty clear, in the discussion here in the province over the years since we first saw legislation brought into this House on this particular issue, where the resistance lies. But where the concerns lie in this are on the question of balancing religious freedoms versus societal progress and the larger public good. The concerns that have been brought forward have largely been around folks that feel like Mr. Carpay in his lawsuit with the 28 schools which are resistant to bringing in safe, inclusive policies, around their feelings that that requirement is trampling on their religious freedoms.

At pretty much every step of progress that we've made as a society, as human beings, as a human race, frankly, we've had this

question of balance that has come forward. I found it interesting as I was sort of taking a moment to read about this online in the context of this legislation. Considering that that is where this resistance lies, it's clear that that is where this Premier and this government have chosen to take their direction in changing how legislation provides these protections in the province of Alberta.

I came across an interesting article in the *Washington Post* from 2017 by Ms Tisa Wenger, an associate professor of American religious history at the Yale Divinity School. Now, Ms Wenger was talking about the situation back in 2017, where there was a legal case with a gentleman named Jack Phillips, who had refused to create a wedding cake for a same-sex couple on the grounds that he felt that it violated his right to free expression, his free exercise of religion as a conservative, evangelical Christian. Ms Wenger notes that while the issues around that particular court case were fresh, it really reflected a larger tension that goes back quite a way between religious freedom and civil rights, that goes quite a way back in American history and indeed, I think, in Canada and many other jurisdictions. This has been a question that we have struggled with as human beings.

She specifically looks back to discussing the challenges around slavery and racial segregation in the U.S., reflecting on the fact that religion and scripture were often cited as justification for those elements of discrimination, and indeed, for what was some serious inequality in the civil rights era, when people refused to serve African-Americans, individuals like myself, they would often do so under the guise of religious freedom. But she notes that as our social norms changed over time, then we no longer considered it acceptable to try to claim a religious justification for blatant discrimination. She notes that historically that has been a challenge that we've had to grapple with, recognizing the sincerity and genuineness of religious belief and wanting to respect that for individuals but also recognizing that, in her words, "religious freedom has been weaponized so frequently in civil liberties debates because of the cultural and constitutional weight it carries."

In other words, recognizing that an individual's personal spiritual beliefs have such deep roots for people, that they are such a personal thing, unfortunately those who may have less than pure motives at times seek to tap into the depth of importance that belief can hold for people in order to use it for their own ends. She notes that those kinds of appeals can have the potential to really

reshape [our] cultural and religious worlds: to make a group's political convictions and cultural practices appear more "religious," or more central to their religion, than they otherwise might have been.

In other words, for particular issues some groups may, for political purposes or to gain greater influence or power, choose to focus on what is really a small element in the larger scheme of a particular spiritual tradition or religious belief and blow that out of proportion.

Her suggestion is that that is what we sort of saw with some as they attempted to justify what was, frankly, purely discrimination by attaching that to their religious belief. She suggests that for that reason, recognizing the power that religious belief holds and its place within our culture traditionally, it's incredibly important that religious freedom needs to be balanced against our other ideals to ensure that it is not used as a means to trample other deeply held values. As I said, she notes that going back quite a way, people who owned slaves – and their sympathizers – would defend slavery by pointing to its presence in the Bible and saying that that was part of God's plan for social order.

She goes on to note that for a gentleman like Mr. Phillips and the folks that were supporting him in refusing to create this cake for this couple, suggesting that their objections were even "of a different order," something "more fundamental," that they were

believing to be clear, that their beliefs regarding LGBTQ individuals and God's opinion of them was something that was even more Biblically substantial, there was more clear scripture sort of outlining the reasons for that discrimination than there had been for racial segregation. She says: you know what? She recognizes that those convictions can be very sincerely held. She is not disputing that, and certainly I don't dispute that. Any individual has the right to hold whatever beliefs they want to hold as sincerely as they wish, whether it's that LGBTQ individuals are disordered or that the Earth is flat or that the moon is made of green cheese. They may hold those beliefs as sincerely as they wish.

But, ultimately, when it comes down to questions like this, when we're talking about civil rights and discrimination within the public sphere and indeed within public institutions funded with public dollars, sincerity is not enough. And Ms Wenger notes that in the kinds of discriminatory beliefs that were being held by Mr. Phillips and were dictating his actions, there was little to distinguish them from "the segregationists who argued that they should not be forced to hire, serve or associate with African Americans." She says:

In short, religious freedom should not be granted this much power.

If religious freedom trumps equality under the law, it provides a "cover" that actually encourages discrimination.

Her reasoning here is that it is choosing to define religious belief solely in the negative, that one's religious belief is simply about what one condemns, what one stands against, who one wishes to exclude. It becomes solely an avenue of judgment.

**6:00 a.m.**

Now, there are many, many, I think, positive aspects, Madam Chair, about spiritual traditions and religious belief that can add a lot of benefit to our world and help move things forward. Indeed, individuals like the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King made great use of his spiritual traditions and his religious beliefs to advance the cause of civil rights, to advance the cause of inclusiveness. Indeed, I shared a letter earlier today from a reverend here in Edmonton who believes the same for the LGBTQ2S-plus community. We've heard from others tonight who have shared similar letters from people of faith, and they also have a deep sincerity of belief. But, again, to be clear, as Ms Wenger was noting and as I note here myself, I am not here to question anybody's sincerity of belief but simply to note that that sincerity should have no bearing on whether that belief should have influence on public policy or the rights of individuals, which brings us back to this legislation and the changes that this government is seeking to make, what balance it is seeking to restore.

As I discussed earlier, Madam Chair, there was clearly an imbalance of power between students, teachers, faculty, administrators, school boards. It's very clear there where the balance of power lies and which way that balance is skewed. The question that we are discussing, that is quite clear, is the balance for a few particular schools', a few particular individuals' religious beliefs versus the protection and the support for LGBTQ2S-plus students.

As we have determined in the past, regardless of how sincerely those beliefs are held, whether or not an individual like Mr. Carpay is doing this genuinely out of his belief or whether it has some other roots, which some of the, frankly, reprehensible comments he has made seem to me to indicate, it should not form a basis on which we are making decisions about how we implement our public policy or about what protections are available for youth in our schools, about whether or not we should be explicit in stating that when students request to form a GSA, it be done immediately, about whether or not we choose to be explicit in our legislation and

provide absolute clarity about what the expectations are for a school or for a teacher or for administration in terms of whether or not they choose to reveal a student's participation in a GSA or a QSA to their parents without their permission.

As I have noted earlier, this government and its members have provided no justification for removing these provisions. They have not provided any reason to this Assembly, so all we can go on is what we have clearly seen from individuals and members of the party, who brought forward provisions like they did at their policy convention back in 2018. They brought forward a proposed provision to insist that parents should be told when their child joins a gay-straight alliance. Members that are currently sitting in this House stood and spoke against that provision. The Minister of Transportation, the Government House Leader and Minister of Environment and Parks, and the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women all spoke out against that. Indeed, the Minister of Transportation noted: this is about outing gay kids. The CBC article has noted that "he was jeered by the crowd" when he brought that up. "Jeered." At the time he said: this will really severely hurt our chances at winning; don't do that to yourself.

I would suggest there are better motives for avoiding that kind of a policy, but that was a concern at the time, and you know what? It turned out that, no, that wasn't enough to prevent this party from forming government. So he was mistaken on that point, but I don't think he was mistaken in recognizing where the roots of these changes and this argument are coming from. Again, as I have discussed previously in this House, I truly believe this is stemming from a mistaken understanding of the place of spiritual belief in forming public policy, a conspiracy theory that, unfortunately, pervades some areas of belief that there are forces in the world that are actively out to destroy people who hold a spiritual belief.

Again, that comes back to our question of discussing: what is the balance of power, and who is it here within this discussion that is the vulnerable party? I recognize that for some who are people of faith, it can be challenging and disconcerting to have the world changing around you and to be confronted with the fact that a majority of society no longer holds to particular ideas that you feel are central to your belief. That does not, in my view, Madam Chair, mean the world is actively out to oppress them, as much as an individual like Mr. Carpay would like to claim, I think, that he and these 28 schools are the victims here of what they believe is an agenda of activists, what they believe is a group of people who are, in their view, intentionally trying to hurt or damage youth, as, unfortunately, members of this government and indeed this Premier at times have tried to suggest.

That is an unreality, that is a fiction, Madam Chair, and it is one that is damaging to vulnerable LGBTQ2S-plus youth. We've been through this cycle in history on so many things before, and we keep coming back around to it. But it is clear, as we continue to progress as a society, that we need to let go of these kinds of prejudices and certainly should not be taking steps to enshrine this kind of mistaken belief and protect it through legislation or regulation. That is not the place of government. The place of government is to uphold the fundamental human rights of all individuals, without prejudice and regardless of religious belief.

**An Hon. Member:** Hear, hear. Absolutely. Nobody here disagrees with you.

**Mr. Shepherd:** I hear one of the members here agreeing with me from the government caucus. I'm pleased to hear that. I recognize that we have no disagreement on that fundamental point.

The question we have is on where that balance lies, and that brings me back around to where I began, Madam Chair. In doing what this government is choosing to do by introducing this legislation, what it is doing by the back door because it does not have the courage to do it publicly and directly, it is not creating balance; it is removing it. It is attempting to hand back – I can't think of anything else to call it – the privilege of discrimination.

6:10 a.m.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I first want to rise to speak against this bill. This morning I'm going to dedicate this one to someone. I was at the Save-On on 109th, just over here, at about 11 o'clock last night, and the young man who was the cashier was doing the announcement to everyone, "The store is closing; get out of here," you know, that announcement. I was picking up a few supplies for this overnight adventure that I was about to go on. This young man, named Chris, was doing his announcement, which he did with an incredible amount of gusto and flair. Here's a guy who's really good at his job.

He puts down the little loudspeaker thing and looks at me and goes, "Oh, it's you." He said my name – I'm not allowed to say my name in here – and he started rattling off the names of all of my colleagues on this side of the House. He said, "You must be going into the Legislature." I said: "Yeah. I'm picking up my Red Bull Sugarfree to go over there. I'm walking over there now." He said, "Go get them" and all of that kind of thing. You know, he was really excited, obviously a really attuned to politics young fellow and obviously doing his job really well, as well, because he was entertaining everyone in the line as he was doing his announcement.

Anyway, speaking to this bill this morning is for Chris. Chris, I'll grab the *Hansard* and drop it off at Save-On-Foods on 109th for you when I'm done.

I'm walking back and I'm thinking to myself: "Okay. I'm going to be speaking to the Education Act and amendments to the Education Act. This is about young people. This is about people like Chris." I mean, he's obviously past high school, likely, given the hour at which he was working, but this is about young people.

So I started thinking about youth movements, and I started thinking about when young people change the world and how the education system is always a part of that – right? – for better and for worse. I've talked about this before. We see social change being tried through the education system in good ways and in bad ways. You know, we saw it with residential schools in bad ways. We've seen it through learning about gender equality, even starting in the 1980s and so on, in good ways. Certainly, we see the creation of GSAs, which we never had when I was in high school in the 1990s, being one of those ways that the education system was weaving together a new consensus around gender identity and sexual orientation at a time when people needed it the most.

You know, I maintain such a fundamental belief in young people and in youth movements towards justice. I was thinking about some of those things – and Chris at Save-On made me think of them – throughout our history and how the education system is often, so often, the catalyst for this.

We just passed June 16, which is Youth Day in South Africa. Why? Because in 1976 there were uprisings around educational reforms that the apartheid regime brought in. They were called Bantu education. It meant that for the African population, they were only educated to be labourers and servants. But also at that time, in 1975, they brought in these reforms that, in addition to English, there had to be Afrikaans taught in the schools. Young people came

together, and they revolted. It was an attempt by a regime to change society through the education system, and it was young people that stood up and said no.

On June 16, 1976, Hector Pieteron, who was 13 years old, was shot in Soweto when there were thousands of people demonstrating. There is a massive memorial to him in Soweto now. That uprising led to the world looking at apartheid through a different lens. It also led to thousands of exiled South Africans and the antiapartheid movement as we now know it. It came from children in the streets. So mess with the young people and the education system at your peril.

My hon. colleague from Edmonton-City Centre just quoted the Minister of Transportation as saying, "Oh, you know, this will have electoral consequences if we move forward with this lake of fire idea," which is the changes that are being contemplated before us now, and as my hon. colleague points out, it did not have those electoral consequences on April 16, 2019. This is not to say that it will not in the future. Young people will be heard.

One of the reasons that I think this has to be the case is that there's a long-standing quote from Dr. Martin Luther King that I think of often, and that is: the arc of history bends toward justice. It actually wasn't his quote originally, and when he writes about it, he actually puts it in quotation marks. The reason for that is because it comes from – I looked it up because it was in my head as I was thinking about why this step backwards is so brutally unnecessary, especially in a liberal democracy, when in particular our constituents and others expect us to move forward on questions of, certainly, civil liberties and equality.

You know, that whole idea of progress and leaving our kids something better than the way we found it and even in the course of our lifetime seeing things get better was kind of borne out of this 19th-century idea of a modernist, in the philosophical way of thinking about it, that we structured ourselves on and structured our thinking on. We weren't stuck in some kind of preordained social hierarchy or any other hierarchy. We could do better. We'd expect better for our kids.

Theodore Parker, actually, the Internet thinks, was the first to use this phrase: the arc of history bends towards justice. In 1853 he published *Ten Sermons of Religion*. He was a Unitarian minister. He was a prominent abolitionist. Here's what he said:

Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.

I, too, am sure that the arc of history bends towards justice. We will look back on this time, this time of taking a couple of steps backwards. Historians will look at the long record of my colleagues speaking on this matter, bringing forth facts and arguments, and they will look at it in the context that eventually justice will, I believe, prevail, just as it did with Bill 24.

You know, in some way things have to get better, and one of the reasons I fundamentally believe that is because I remember what it was like when they weren't better. I remember the first gay man at the age of 17 coming out to me. He was one of my friends. I remember the look of terror in his eyes as he said to me, "Do not tell anyone; my stepdad," of whom he was terrified, "will kill me, and the kids at school will kill me." Knowing what I knew about where I grew up, I couldn't dispute that, the kind of language that we heard, the sorts of violence that we often heard, so I and the two other girlfriends that I had at the time – we were all friends of his – kept it to ourselves. There was no GSA in the 1990s. There was no help for him.

6:20 a.m.

Things have to get better. One of my roommates, when I was in my mid-20s, used to sit when we were watching TV and he would kind of crack his jaw, you know, in that really irritating way. I would say to him, “Can you not do that?” He would say: “Sorry. I can’t actually help it. They broke my jaw when I was in high school because they thought I was gay. Ever since then I’ve kind of done that unconsciously.” It turned out that he’s not gay; he was just sort of slightly effeminate in northern British Columbia. But they broke his jaw because they thought he was gay.

I think things have to get better because of a conversation I had about two weeks ago at Lethbridge pride. A woman – I believe her name was Catherine; I’m going to have to look it up; I know I wrote it down in my notes – came up to me at the Lethbridge pride beer gardens, a place that I am known to frequent on a Saturday afternoon, and she said: “Yeah. Of course, I want to sign that petition. I could have really used this.” She went to a private school a couple of years ago, one of the private schools that is part of the 28, a private religious school. She said, “My parents sent me there because they weren’t exactly open to me coming out and my sexuality, so they sent me there.” And she said, “And I went there, and I was ostracized during my time in that high school.”

Things have to get better for kids like her. They absolutely have to. I don’t ever, ever want to have somebody look me in the eye and say: “They’re going to kill me. They broke my jaw. I was ostracized.” I never want to hear that again as long as I live. That’s why I’ll stand here for as long as it takes and speak for folks in as many different ways as it takes to get through to this government that taking steps backwards on this is the wrong thing to do. It will ultimately be undone because the kids are all right, and the kids will change it.

I want to read a few interventions that I have received from my own constituents and from across southern Alberta because, you know, maybe if the members opposite are not interested in hearing from me or my colleagues and our anecdotes, perhaps they want to hear from people who, within about 45 minutes of us putting out the call, wrote to us a number of different thoughts.

There’s one from Mary, who’s a member of the LDS church and lives in Lethbridge.

GSAs are important because they help our children feel included and supported. The research is clear on this. My children have been active in GSAs, and it made a big difference for them so they could connect with other youth. GSAs are crucially important and need to remain safe. Thanks.

I want to read something from a woman in Coalhurst.

I have raised two of my own children but housed more than 17 other teenagers who had to leave home during high school or immediately afterwards. Some have lived with us for as long as three years. For some of these kids a GSA could have made a real difference, but they were not common before 2015. I will keep taking young people into my home when they need a safe place to live, but I really wish that more people could open their hearts to how tough it is for some kids.

If you made it through high school with only great memories, then you are the weird one. Most kids have stories of rejection and pain, some are abused, and many feel alone. Some of those kids cannot turn to home for help, so they find someone like me. Imagine what a safe place at school and a safe teacher at school could do for a kid who needed it.

Please keep fighting for our young people. They need you.

They need GSAs, and they need them to be safe and private.

Here’s another thought from a constituent of Lethbridge-East.

As a community member who currently works with at-risk persons, worked in schools for more than five years, an individual who still has family members working in the education system, I

cannot speak out against Bill 8 more. Not only does this bill needlessly place the lives of students in danger; it removes the element of social safety that keeps students thriving. GSAs offer an opportunity for self-expression and peer support.

If it isn’t bad enough that the government is looking to put thousands of youth at risk, the change in the age allowable to remain in high school from 21 to 19 impedes the opportunity for those who are already on the 21-year-old track to graduate.

This bill does not at all represent the Alberta that I expected to be witnessed by our youth. We have a responsibility to ensure our youth are well educated, both academically and socially, that they have safe spaces to be and to find themselves, and that we are not wilfully willing to put their lives at risk for the sake of political gain. I expect better of my elected representatives. Thank you, NDP, for continuing to fight for the coming generations.

I heard from a number of different constituents. I actually didn’t get to finish reading the letter from Zane when I spoke a few hours ago, so I want to give her maybe a few more words here. Zane talks about the peer-reviewed academic studies on the positive effects of GSAs and QSAs. Zane talks about how LGBT Albertans are just like everyone else and that they pay taxes, have opinions, and want the very things the UCP members want in this world. She then goes on – and this was the part I didn’t get to say earlier – to say:

We must protect the youth from uncaring families. If the UCP don’t want to spend money on social housing – many LGBTQ youth are homeless after coming out to family – then uphold the GSA, QSA protections.

She goes on to write:

Many UCP members think that being LGBTQ is a choice. It’s as much of a choice as any member in the Legislature being heterosexual and cisgender.

From Zane, one of my constituents. Bless her.

You know, finally, if I have an opportunity and a bit of time, I’m going to read a letter from an instructor in psychology at Lethbridge College. Her name is Jennifer Davis, and she writes in this letter, which was originally a letter to the Lethbridge school district – the reason she had written the letter is because there was a group of anti-LGBT activists who tried to stop the school district from bringing in a GSA policy, in and around the time of Bill 24, even within the public system. This is where we’re going to see this eroding over time in some places.

I mean, they were not successful, those anti-LGBT activists in Lethbridge. The public school board brought in the policy and has reaffirmed to me time and again that there are no plans to change it. They think it works for them. But this letter was written at that time. As is consistent with this particular professor of psychology, everything is footnoted, so I will table it for *Hansard*. Here it goes.

My name is Jennifer Davis. I have a PhD in psychology. I’ve published articles on parent-child interactions. I teach child development and adolescent development, but today I’m here as a mother. Today I’m here to represent the rights of our children, all of our children.

I guess it wasn’t a letter. It was a speech. Sorry, Madam Chair.

Some argue that this policy is unnecessary, that it goes too far. They say that our children are already protected. The very existence of this meeting proves that they are not.

I’ve provided the context, Madam Chair. This is about people trying to undo GSA policies at the local board level.

Some say that they support our queer youth and that they oppose this policy for other reasons. This is not what our children hear. They hear that our school board is trying to pass a policy intended to protect them and that these people are trying to stop it. Imagine how this makes them feel. LGBTQ children in this province are thrown out of their homes. They’re living homeless

on the streets. They're dying. They're as much as 10 times more likely to attempt suicide, 14 times in Calgary.

That is footnoted.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among LGBTQ youth, yet some would block the policy designed to try to keep them alive or rewrite it to erase their existence. These things are happening right now in this province to children just because they are gay, lesbian, or transgender, maybe not to your children, maybe not to mine, but they are happening, and these children are somebody's children. They are our children. They are our responsibility and our protection.

Ms Davis goes on as part of her speech:

"Parental rights," some may argue. "I have a right to know what my child is telling their teachers."

I will table this speech, Madam Chair.

6:30 a.m.

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

**Mr. Carson:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise again to speak on behalf of, I imagine, the majority of my constituents, who are very concerned with the changes proposed under this piece of legislation, Bill 8.

Once again, I am left with many questions. I do appreciate the comments that have been made by my hon. colleagues here in the House this morning, and I appreciate that it comes from a wealth of knowledge in the backgrounds that my caucus members have. Unfortunately, I don't have the same background as them, but it's always enlightening to hear from them, of course.

When we're legislating on education or the system of education, I think that the members on this side of the House are quite well equipped to comment on those facts considering the people that we have here: of course, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora being the chair of the public school board here in Edmonton for a period of time and also the Health minister. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood drafted policies during the curriculum redevelopment, drafted pieces of that, and of course also a teacher; the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and his experience working with people who have been affected by issues like the one before us. I imagine I could go on and on. Also, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud had a very close hand in informing the Education Act that is being proposed to be brought forward, and she went into great detail about the concerns, even after the piece of legislation was drafted, that continued to be there and how this legislation before us actually weakens what was even there in the first place.

You know, we talk about consulting on pieces of legislation like Bill 8, and we've heard many concerns in this House about what it means to push this piece of legislation forward, so I'm very concerned that so far this morning we've only heard one side of the House talk. I'm very concerned that we aren't hearing answers, and I think that if the government and UCP caucus were properly respecting the voice and the concerns of Albertans, they would stand up and speak, too. Whether it's scripted by someone else other than themselves or not is a totally different point.

Now, I also want to touch on the fact that this legislation is going to disproportionately affect and harm people and youth in rural communities. You know, here in Edmonton we have many nonprofits that support members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community, but those same resources are not necessarily available to youth in rural communities. If they happen to go to a school that does not necessarily support GSAs and QSAs the same way that a school in Edmonton or Calgary or any other municipality might, then they really have very little other resources or recourse to have

their questions answered or even just finding a support group that identifies the same way that they do, so that's very concerning for me. What happens when the resources aren't there? Well, I hate to break it to you, but kids go to the Internet. That is a whole different scary world, for people to be throwing things into Google and, you know: I'm feeling lucky today; hopefully, I'll get some real answers. Most of the time they're probably not. So it's very concerning that the members of this government and the private members of the UCP caucus do not understand that this is not good. This is not a good piece of legislation.

Of course, I really also question how the front bench of this government went from recognizing that legislating on an issue like Bill 8, like weakening protections for GSAs and QSAs, how they went from having this discussion at their policy convention and members that are now ministers bringing forward the fact that this was not good politics, not only for re-election, which didn't affect them, I suppose – good for them – but it's still going to negatively affect the youth in our communities. So how they went from advocating that members vote against weakening these protections to actually sitting in the government and thinking that it was a good idea to actually move forward with weakening these protections, once again, leads me to believe that they have been receiving great support from special-interest groups, that are now coming back with receipts and saying, "Well, you owe us one, and we're ready to cash these cheques now in the form of weakening protections for youth in marginalized communities." It is very concerning that these are the voices that these members are going to listen to, the voices that the ministers are going to listen to when we have a wealth of knowledge out there in the school system across the province who are saying that this is not a good idea, that this is going to harm youth. Statistics show – and they've been read into the record – that this is going to lead to more self-harm by those who identify as LGBTQ.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

It's very concerning that the members aren't taking this seriously enough to stand up and put their voice on the record. I mean, if they have concerns with the balance, quote, unquote, that was put forward in Bill 24 and the protections that we put forward, then these members of the government should be willing to stand up and say so. The sad fact is that they haven't been willing to stand up and say that, which is very unfortunate because people across the province have questions and they have concerns and they want to be heard. I'm seeing it on social media even as this debate continues. There are members of constituencies across this province – I won't get into naming constituencies specifically, but there are people looking for answers, and they're being ignored by the members opposite, which is very concerning. I think that if you're going to sit in this House and make a decision on a vote and voice your opinion and not listen to the members of your community, whether it's the majority or the minority of people in your community, you should at least be willing to respond to them and tell them why you're voting the way that you are.

Now, I also want to just come back to the fact that – you know, I've been watching the campaign of corporations getting involved with supporting the LGBTQ community, which I think overall is very important, for them to voice their support as well. But just even the things that people say, which is much easier for them when they hide behind a fake account on social media – and we've heard the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood share some. Maybe you didn't get into specific details, but I've seen the things that are said about that member on social media, and it's so disheartening. I really can't put into words how disgusting, really, it is that people

are willing to go out of their way to try and break somebody down because of the way that they identify or the person that they love. I would never go out onto social media and attack somebody, a male loving a female or whatever it is, or for religion or for anything because at the end of the day, it's discrimination. The fact that people in this province think it's okay to go out there and feel like it brings something to themselves to go out there and do that is very disheartening, and it's frustrating.

I just wanted to point out that people in the LGBTQ community are some of the bravest people that I've ever met. You know, for somebody in grade 7 to recognize that they fundamentally identify as something other than what they were born as or love somebody other than what society is telling them is the norm is incredibly brave, especially against all odds and the people, the naysayers, out there that tell them that they're wrong. That they're willing to continue fighting for what they believe in and fighting for their own rights and the rights of other people is incredibly brave, and I really want to commend them for that.

6:40 a.m.

I also just want to point out the fact that the government and the UCP caucus members here today that are, well, presumably going to vote Bill 8 through – of course, we don't know that yet. Maybe some of them will have a change of heart. We'll wait and see. The fact is that you are siding with these people who go out on social media day after day and attack people in the LGBT community, and they demoralize people in this community. These people are the ones that are applauding your move to weaken GSA protections. I'm wondering how that makes you feel, when the people who are on the side of the LGBT community are saying, "You're going to hurt this community; you're going to increase concerns around mental health and increase concerns around suicide" while you have this other group of people that don't believe that being LGBTQ or identifying as such is a normal thing, people that think it's a mental illness, that think these people are sick. Those are the people that are siding with this government. So I really am interested to find out why you are deciding to go with that side of the argument. That's also very concerning to me.

Now, once again, overall with this bill, you know, the Education minister has gone on at length to say that this is strengthening the education system in our province. Really, if you listen to the people who are going to have to work within the system, they are saying the exact opposite. The fact is that we've seen some minor changes throughout the bill, throughout the amendment act, and really a focus on weakening gay-straight alliances, on weakening the provisions for students to be able to create them in a timely manner, to be able to name them queer-straight alliances or gay-straight alliances, so it's very concerning that this is what this government is focusing on.

I think we have some amendments coming forward very soon, and I'm very interested to hear how the government feels about them. We've seen some common-sense amendments brought forward already that had very little conversation around, which is also very concerning. At the end of the day, this government is going to have to be accountable for the decisions and the legislation that they put forward. They are going to have to be accountable to these at-risk youth, who are going to question their judgment and are going to question: where were you when we needed you? You know, not only today but in the next 10 years these people are going to have questions for you. I suppose if you're willing to go to them and say, "Look, unfortunately, our donors were more important than protecting your rights," then I guess that's a conversation that you can have with those people at that time.

Once again, I look forward to continuing to speak to this bill and share my disagreements with it. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak, Mr. Chair.

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

I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood standing to speak.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise for the third time this fine morning to . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Three times is the charm.

**Member Irwin:** That's right. Yeah.

Anyways, it is a privilege to speak in this House at any time. I don't take that privilege lightly. I've spoken many times about my own experience and my own background as a teacher and a vice-principal in rural Alberta. Last week I asked our minister about protections for teachers. I didn't get an answer. Instead the answer was something about distraction and about focusing on divisive issues. You know, I have to say that I have truly heard from countless teachers, parents, students both from the community and not, allies as well. I've heard from a lot of teachers from different corners of this province: rural, urban, Catholic, not, new teachers, older teachers.

Here's just one example, a message that came from Twitter.

I just wanted to send a message of appreciation and support for everything you are doing to challenge and fight the Conservatives on Bill H8. I'm a gay Albertan teacher worried about my students and my own protection at work. You are defending a lot of people, and I'm so grateful we have people like you in government representing us. Thank you for everything you do.

Here's another one from someone on Instagram:

Thank you for everything you're [doing] in the Legislature. My wife and I are both teachers and it's so important for our LGBTQ2+ kids. We'll both lose our jobs before we out a kid.

Here's another one from Instagram. If you don't know Instagram, or Insta, as the kids call it, that's where it's at.

**Mr. Eggen:** What is this?

**Member Irwin:** I will tell you all about it, hon. member.

This, actually, teacher said:

I'm . . . part of a Teacher GSA for Edmonton Catholic. It was the first teacher GSA in Alberta and honestly it made me more comfortable with myself and how to navigate the catholic world while being gay. Now I'm working with the public district in my area to create a joint public/catholic GSA. That too has been amazing.

We know that last week the Alberta Teachers' Association raised their concerns about the potential loss of protections for LGBTQ teachers and staff. Past ATA president Greg Jeffery noted:

A school that is not a safe and welcoming space for gender minority teachers cannot be a safe and welcoming space for gender minority students.

He called on the Legislature to pass amendments to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, to maintain employment protections for LGBTQ-plus teachers and other staff. He said:

We are concerned about the . . . effect of the legislation on GSAs and on LGBTQ+ students, but we are also very concerned about the removal of explicit protections for sexual and gender minority teachers and other staff when [it's] proclaimed.

As you know, Bill 24, which was An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, passed in 2017 by my hon. colleague here when he was Education minister, the Member for Edmonton-North West, amended the School Act to introduce a requirement for school boards to establish policies that would affirm the Charter and the

human rights of staff, and it contained specific statements that boards could not, would not discriminate against any staff on the protected grounds outlined in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

But as Mr. Jeffrey says:

Unfortunately, some school boards have chosen to discriminate against gender minority employees, justifying their actions as an exercise of their denominational rights. Bill 24 added protection by committing boards to pledge that they would not do this.

We know the ATA is very clear in supporting and defending the constitutional rights of Catholic schools boards to provide faith-based education. That's not in question here. But they do draw a line when school boards attempt to use their denominational rights to justify discriminatory practices or disregard other human rights. In cases where this has happened – and it has – the ATA has vigorously defended the rights of those teachers affected.

Saying all that, it's clear that teachers, that staff, that the Alberta Teachers' Association have all expressed their concerns about the loss of those protections in Bill 8. As such, I would like to move an amendment that would address some of these issues. I will wait for it to be dispersed, and then I will speak to it.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you. Given that we have a limited number of pages, would you be so kind as to just read it into the record for everybody's benefit?

**Member Irwin:** I will do that right now.

**The Deputy Chair:** Please feel free immediately to continue speaking.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be amended by striking out section 10 and substituting the following:

10 Section 33 is amended

- (a) in subsection 1(e) by striking out "specialized";
- (b) in subsection (3)(d)(ii) by adding ", in addition to any other requirements under subsection (3.1)" after "one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the Alberta Human Rights Act";
- (c) by adding the following after subsection (3):
  - (3.1) A policy and a code of conduct established under subsection (2) must
    - (a) affirm the rights, as provided for in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, of each staff member employed by the board and each student enrolled in a school operated by the board, and
    - (b) contain one or more statements that staff members employed by the board and students enrolled in a school operated by the board will not be discriminated against as provided for in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** For everybody's benefit, this amendment will be referred to as A3.

6:50 a.m.

**Member Irwin:** Okay. With that, I'm going to allow my colleague to speak to it, and then I'll come back to it. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen to speak.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to my colleague for taking the time to prepare this important amendment. I really have to say that she every day comes to this place with her charisma, her uniqueness, her nerve, and her talent, and she puts it to work for good. I am so honoured to work alongside her.

I thought I'd mention a couple of RuPaul quotes. Just so you know, it's 7 a.m. Nothing more inspiring than a beautiful sunrise and a little RuPaul. One quote that I think is fitting for today is that RuPaul says: I think this life is hard without assistance from others. Pretty simple. Pretty interesting quote. For those of you who aren't familiar with RuPaul, I encourage you, when you have some downtime, to fire up Netflix and watch a few episodes of *Drag Race*. I think it says a lot about the human spirit, and there's something about seeing men get all taped up that makes me feel like things are right in this world. I think there's a lot to be said for taking the situation you have, finding your own inner peace.

One of her famous lines is: you know, if you can't love yourself, how the hell are you going to love somebody else, right? Again, a pretty philosophical statement coming from a very famous drag queen. Definitely, this life is hard without assistance from others. This is from somebody who talks about growing up as a boy in the southwest, not really seeing himself. Or maybe in the southern United States. I forget exactly where. Somewhere where they use a roux to make a lot of bases for good sauces and good Creole cooking. I think that's where the name came from. Not seeing yourself reflected in the society that you live in, it's hard without assistance from others.

One of the things that I think about when I walk into this place with my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is one day when I was in a society and education class at the U of A, just across this beautiful river. You can see it from the balcony outside. We did a survey on day one in that class, and it was pretty clear that the vast majority of us were white and middle class. I don't remember if "straight" was one of the metrics that we discussed, but we were a pretty homogeneous group of folks that were entering into the profession of teaching. Then we learned a little about the complexities that we would be serving in our society through our classrooms. One of the things that our professor talked about is that there are a lot of kids who won't see themselves in you. They won't see themselves reflected in who you are when you walk into the classroom, so you're going to have to find ways to help inspire them to see themselves in you but also to see themselves in the profession and to see themselves as higher learners and to see themselves as potentially becoming teachers.

I think the universities are working to try to attract more students who are representative of the population at large in our society. I think one of the areas we often talk about is indigenous students and indigenous classroom completion rates or high school completion rates. Of course, aspiring to have more indigenous students in classrooms is, I think, an attainable goal, and I think it's one that we should achieve all day, every day as best we can. I think it's important for us to find opportunities for students to see themselves reflected in the people who are there teaching them. And it's the same for LGBTQ kids and LGBTQ parents.

By considering this amendment that's been brought forward by my hon. colleague, we're saying to LGBTQ adults: you belong in a classroom. But we're also saying to LGBTQ kids: this is a career path you can aspire to. I think both of those are important pieces. I think the idea of this amendment came forward originally from the Alberta Teachers' Association. I know we have members of this

House who maybe aren't current or active members but have been members of the ATA for many years. We probably have some very active members, too. The ATA said: this is important for our profession. This is in line with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We've had cases of postsecondary institutions not respecting, trying to be able to dismiss somebody based on their orientation. I know that the now Premier spoke out in support of those decisions to terminate employees. Of course, we know the story. It went as high as the Supreme Court of Canada, and Delwin Vriend won his case. It was determined that there was no right for him to be terminated from his place of employment. He absolutely had a right as a gay man to teach at King's University College, I'm assuming, at that time.

This amendment doesn't need to come forward. We could just stick with the legislation the way we have it. We don't need to pass Bill 8. But if everyone is committed to passing Bill 8, this is one of the things that will make Bill 8 less hateful, less divisive, less damaging.

This life is hard without assistance from others. We have an opportunity today to assist others and to make sure that the profession and the teachers who are already in the profession know that they are safe in their profession and that they are respected by the Members of this Legislative Assembly. We also have an opportunity to say to our LGBTQ youth, "You belong in the teaching profession, too," again, a demographic that's statistically more likely to drop out, less likely to have high rates of completion. I think that that's something that we should all be working to make sure we address.

The last thing I want to say before I ask my colleague to comment more from her lived experience as well as the work that she's done, one more RuPaul quote just to round it off: "My [goal] is to always come from a place of love, but sometimes you just have to break it down . . ." So to my colleague: would you please break it down for us, why this amendment is so necessary in today's consideration of this legislation?

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen to speak.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. What I'd like to do is that I'd like to share – I think it would be really helpful for the members opposite to hear the story; they've heard my story a lot in this House – a story and some anecdotes from Dan Grassick. He is an award-winning Alberta teacher with almost two decades of experience working in the province's public education system as a teacher, a school leader, and a university instructor. He told me about his years working in middle and junior high schools in Calgary and how, before the passage of Bill 24, his LGBTQ students struggled to feel safe with who they are in the places where they learn. He told me about the important role that GSAs play for all students.

He told me about a brave grade 9 boy who took the chance to come out to his mother one evening. Her response was to tell him that he was just going through a phase and that it's too early to know that he's gay. Although his parents were very supportive of their son's school, sports, and other successes, where this student's sexuality was concerned, unfortunately they fell short.

He told me about another student who struggled through junior and senior high to feel that they could come out to their family despite the fact that his parents and siblings were wonderfully loving and supportive. Ultimately, this student's friends staged a kind of intervention where they told him that he was loved and accepted for who he was and that he could come to them for support until he was able to share his orientation with his family.

He told me the tragic story of delivering a eulogy at the funeral of a high school student who had taken his own life on Valentine's Day. This is a student who seemed to have it all going – good looks, loving friends and family, academic achievement, athleticism, musical talent, you name it – but he didn't have anyone to talk to about the one part of his being with which he struggled the most.

*7:00 a.m.*

He told me his anecdotes in the hopes that they would remind us that GSAs don't just provide a safe space for those LGBTQ students with difficult home lives and situations that put them at the increased risk of homelessness, as reported in the academic literature, but also for students from supportive, stable homes who need a place where they can be welcomed unconditionally and receive support.

GSAs are not the ideological sex clubs that fringe social conservatives describe. They're simply safe spaces for students to sit, to have lunch. Those GSAs that are more organized may put on events that increase the overall well-being and inclusivity of the entire school community. There's nothing to fear from GSAs, and the value they provide to LGBTQ youth is beyond measure.

He also shared that even LGBTQ youth who are blessed with cognitive, physical, and emotional gifts, who come from loving families, who are surrounded by supportive friends, they too need the structured safe spaces that GSAs provide. He also shared with me, as a teacher, that except for very recently he's kept his own sexual orientation a secret.

He describes overt and casual homophobia as being rampant when he was a student and a beginning teacher. He told me about being in junior and senior high and how he was teased for being gay even though he was relatively straight acting and he took steps to fake the heterosexual norm. He told me about years of being called "fag" and "queer" in the hallways. He told me about sitting with friends at lunch and watching an older student go out of their way to come over to punch him in the arm and call him "homo." He told me about being spat on while minding his own business on the school bus and how his cries for someone to help were ignored by his fellow students. He told me about how he gradually became more involved in school leadership, intramurals, and clubs so that he could hide from his persecutors over the lunch hours. He told me how he occasionally considered suicide and self-harm but that these feelings passed quickly.

He credits his resiliency to his loving family and summers spent as a camper and staff member at a YMCA residential camp. He says: "I learned early in my youth who I was and that I had many strengths. This self-actualization made it relatively easy for me to push the bullying and harassment I received aside." But despite this, he told me that he didn't come out to his closest friends and family until his late 20s. He certainly didn't confess to being gay to his teaching colleagues. He wishes that GSAs were present during his K to 12 education, and he laments that he wasn't able to be out when he started teaching. He's concerned that this government's changes to the Education Act are a backwards step that could create barriers for our young LGBTQ Albertans.

The topics we're discussing today aren't bumper sticker issues. They're matters of fundamental human rights that have been ignored for too long. Having vanilla safe and caring school policies, boilerplate inclusivity policies: those aren't enough to create the safe learning and working environments that Alberta's LGBTQ students and teachers deserve. Dan's story is the story of many. As I said, I'm not exaggerating when I say that multiple teachers have reached out to me to share their concerns.

I'll end my comments by again urging this government to consider this amendment. This is reasonable. This simply affirms

the rights for teachers and for staff as provided in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As a queer teacher myself, how can I provide a safe space for my students if I don't feel safe myself?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen to speak.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to follow up, I think, a very excellent presentation of some concerns with regard to the safety of queer teachers in the public system as it's reflected in this act. I have some personal connection with a little bit of what has been discussed earlier as I once shared a room in a building with Delwin Vriend, who was mentioned earlier. He was an instructor at King's college and was released from his employment because of being a queer instructor at King's college at the time, now King's University. This became a very significant case in the history of Alberta, going all the way to the Supreme Court, where it was identified that it was unconstitutional for an institution, including an institution with a religious orientation such as King's, to fire someone on the basis of sexual orientation because it was protected by the Constitution and the Human Rights Act.

You know, having been witness to much of that going on in this province and the effect that it had on some of the legislation that subsequently got enacted here in the province of Alberta, thankfully, based on the Supreme Court decision, to continue to protect the rights of individuals who are part of the LGBTIQ-plus community in their positions as employees of institutions.

I am concerned that we are taking a step back from some of the work that has been done, I must say, not only by progressive governments such as our own but even by the Progressive Conservative government prior to our term in the government. I think it's important that there be no lack of clarity in this act to identify the importance of protecting people in their employment situation. Of course, we have spent many years in this province, really in all western democracies, establishing a rule of law that guides us when we make decisions.

Of course, by establishing and, in our case, repatriating and subsequently amending our Constitution here in Canada, we ensure that the rights of people are protected not only with regard to traditional areas of concern such as the rights of people based on religion or gender or other factors like that but also to include sexual orientation.

I think it's important that this government not be seen to be trying to diminish the rights not only of people in the queer community but also the rights of employees who have been working for many years to ensure that they have the ability to engage in a fruitful occupation and derive an appropriate income without fear that they will lose the ability to provide for themselves and provide for their families because of factors which are not in any way interfering with the work that they have signed on to provide to the institution or to the agency or organization that has hired them.

**7:10 a.m.**

I think that this is an opportunity for the government just to set down now, once and for all, their ongoing commitment to continue to support the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to enshrine that in law and to declare that with this particular government they are not heading back in time, reversing the work that had been done by many previous governments since the 1980s, when the Vriend decision was initiated and ultimately ended up in the Supreme Court of Canada.

I would be very concerned if the government side simply chose not to do that.

We're starting to fear, on this side of the House, a trend in government legislation that has been brought forward of a diminishment of people's rights, taking away things that have been long established and have been repeatedly reinforced by the Supreme Court with regard to both LGBTQ2S-plus rights and with regard to labour rights. If we are seeing the thin edge of the wedge, I'm getting very concerned about where we'll be four years hence if that wedge begins to split open the long-established rights that have been recognized by this government in the past and leads us to a place of having folks identified as somehow lesser than others in one way or another and suffering personal loss as a result of that being viewed as lesser than.

I guess I would ask this government to take the opportunity to clear that up, to cast aside any concern that may be held, if you're on this side of the House, about the intentions of this government. We know that should they choose to infringe on those rights, inevitably this will end up back in the courts, and I would imagine that sooner rather than later and inevitably it will rise through the courts of appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, where we will get the same answer that we have had repeatedly in the past when these decisions have been brought forward to the Supreme Court of Canada. There has been an extremely high level of consistency in the Supreme Court decisions over the last 30 or 40 years on the rights of individuals, as are reflected by the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I think that this is a great chance for the government not only to declare themselves and to save some individuals a significant level of grief as they have to go through all that court process repeatedly, one court to the next to the next, but also, of course, save this government significant dollars and wasted energy and the time of the public servants on pursuing actions that are doomed to failure. Again, another thing that we are becoming increasingly concerned about on this side of the House: the government seems bent on engaging in acts that we know will be defeated by the Supreme Court when they get there. It's a shame that we have to go through a process to arrive at that moment given that we have literally spent the last 30 years in this province asking those questions and seeking the answers, receiving those answers, and then moving on.

With the desire to head backwards in time and to go to a previous era and to relitigate the rights that have been well established and honoured not only in the province of Alberta but throughout Canada, in the individual provinces, and, of course, by the federal government itself, as a result I think it's time for us to just be clear, to set the record straight, and to have this government move out of the past and into beginning to plan the future, begin to tell us, declare to us how they will help to build this province rather than to fight and destroy and to take back that which has been built over the last 30 or 40 years.

This is a great opportunity, and I'd like to give the government an opportunity to stand now, to rise in this House and show their commitment to those long-established and hard-fought rights. I would most welcome joining with them in some formal declaration of those rights such as the inclusion of this amendment into Bill 8.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see the hon. Minister of Education has risen to speak.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you so much for this opportunity to speak to the amendment. I thank you for the amendment. I've had a chance to review the Education Act and specifically sections 31 and 33, where it is being proposed. I find that in the Education Act

we do have those protections in place. When you look at section 33(1) – it's quite extensive – under Board Responsibilities it says:

- A board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to
- (a) deliver appropriate education programming to meet the needs of all students enrolled in a school operated by the board and to enable their success.

It goes on. We go to subsection (d), where it says:

- (d) ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

It goes on to name numerous other things that are responsibilities of the board.

Then we flip the page over – it does go to page 38 – to subsection (3), which says that it will contain the following items:

- (i) a statement of purpose that provides a rationale for the code of conduct, with a focus on welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments;
- (ii) one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the Alberta Human Rights Act.

So right there we have it, in writing, in the Education Act: "One or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the Alberta Human Rights Act."

Then it goes on:

- (iii) one or more statements about what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the . . . day or by electronic means;
- (iv) one or more statements about the consequences of unacceptable behaviour, which must take account of the student's age, maturity and individual circumstances . . .

et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Again, this notion that LGBTQ-plus teachers and other school staff are no longer protected is complete fiction. It's another example that we are being manipulated by scare tactics. We do have this comprehensive rights law in Alberta. The opposition knows that.

I do feel that this amendment is redundant. Everything that they are looking for is already contained within the body of the Education Act. Therefore, I would ask my fellow caucus members to vote against it.

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any members looking to speak to A3? I heard some conversation happening regarding it. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen to speak.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise with great interest in speaking to this amendment, which is A3. Is that what you said? Okay. Great. I was very interested as well to hear comments from the Education minister in this regard. You know, I find it very interesting and deeply ironic that the Education minister would choose to come forward and both speak against this amendment and then talk about some individual places in the Education Act where she feels that this would make this particular amendment redundant.

7:20 a.m.

You know, Mr. Chair, again, we know what's been happening here in the province of Alberta over the last number of months. I can remember very specifically where individual school boards were having a problem. There were discriminatory cases being brought forward where certain teachers in Catholic boards were

actually having these rights compromised. I mean, if anything, it underlines the absolute necessity of making sure that these aspects of this amendment in regard to the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms must be and should be underlined at this very point in time in history. I know that I specifically as Minister of Education asked for school boards to submit their policies to ensure that there was not discrimination built into any of the employment contracts that they were signing with individuals working in their school boards.

I'd be curious to know – actually, I've asked the minister – if she could perhaps give us an update as to the status of those analyses of those contracts to ensure that there is not built into contracts between teachers or support staff, custodial staff, administration any sign of a discriminatory practice that would somehow compromise the integrity of that person to do their job. Quite frankly, Mr. Chair, this is exactly the reason and the substance behind why we had to build Bill 24 in the first place. It was not just to help to protect and create safe and caring environments and to help to create GSAs and the integrity of GSAs and QSAs, but it was also to protect the integrity of staff, all people working in schools, students and teachers and support staff and administration, and to ensure that there was a safe and caring environment for them in which to operate.

You know, that, again, simply underlines the hypocrisy of moving back to this Education Act, which is, by the way, Mr. Chair, just a hollow shell of what this government is trying to sell to the people of Alberta, calling it some sort of improvement, modernization of education here in the province of Alberta. Quite frankly, the Education Act is not dissimilar – I'm sure many members can appreciate this metaphor, right? It's like that old tractor that you parked out on the back 40, and you figured that someday you're going to fix it up. But what you ended up doing is taking parts off it from year to year until there's nothing left to plow the field with. That's what this Education Act is.

I specifically went to this Education Act as minister and took out the bits that we needed to update the School Act. Along the way we saw this old tractor, again, as it sat there out on the back 40 – right? – with people taking the wheels off it and the crankshaft and the power takeoff, and then suddenly they're resurrecting it now. The new government takes over, finds this old hulk of a tractor sitting out in the field, puts a coat of paint on it, and says that it's the new, modern education system. I mean, well, I think it's a pretty good metaphor. It's a little bit amusing, but it's also pathetic. Really, it's purely, you know, trying to sell something that is simply not the case.

With this amendment, Mr. Chair, it's a great opportunity – and I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for bringing this forward – a great way by which we can punctuate the absolute necessity of protecting all children and staff under the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think it's a great way to try to at least move in a direction that, you know, this government seems to be doing in regard to the Education Act, this insistence on moving the Education Act. I appreciate the sentiment that's behind it.

I know as a teacher that one of the best techniques by which to drive home an idea is to make sure that you can use some repetition, right? By repetition, you learn something. What I know from teaching my own children when they were little is that, you know, you've got to at least try seven times before they sort of internalize something.

Again, since the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are being compromised by this government and by this Education Act, then this amendment at least helps to remind us of what our responsibilities are in regard to basic

human rights. This amendment helps to underline that. I thank the hon. member for doing that and punctuating it using the time-honoured tradition of teaching through repetition to make sure that we get it right.

I think that a lot of people will watch and listen to what's been happening in regard to this Bill 8 – right? – Bill Straight, Bill Hate. It's going to move and continue to move through conversations with Albertans over the summer, over the next winter, back into the fall again, and will continue to evolve and move. While this government seems to want to move backwards, move Alberta backwards, the population of this province sure doesn't want to go backwards. They are moving forwards. They're a young, dynamic, well-educated, and engaged population, and this is an issue that deserves and will garner plenty of attention and not just now.

It's not going to be swept under the rug – right? – with talking points and saying: we're modernizing the education system. Well, you know, teachers and parents and students, that are engaged in the education system every day, will find out pretty quick that that old tractor that this government tried to put a new paint job on and sell a bill of goods on as being modernization is not anything that resembles that at all. It's quite the opposite, moving backwards, using education as a political tool rather than a functioning part of what's best for kids and what's best for our society.

Yeah, I would encourage everyone to read the amendment carefully and support it, as I do. Hopefully, we can move on to building better legislation here in the future.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we are on A3. I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen to speak.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak to A3, that was brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that says that she moves that Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be amended by striking out section 10 and substituting the following. This is an amendment that just simply makes sense. It talks about acknowledging what is already in place under the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it would just simply enhance the safety “of each staff member employed by the board and each student enrolled . . . by the board.”

I can echo a lot of what other members on this side of the House have been saying, Mr. Chair, when it comes to supporting our GSAs and having this conversation that's happening across the province. We've heard from so many people from the LGBTQ-plus community, from people that are allies of the community such as teachers, principals, support staff, social workers, like myself, and parents that are just concerned that this is something that their children may one day need or maybe already need.

It's quite concerning, Mr. Chair, that this is something that we're talking about today. This is a conversation that should have been dealt with back when Bill 10 was originally introduced. We know that Bill 10 was simply a shell of a piece of legislation, that was never really intended to be enforced. When we became government, we saw that, so we made steps to make sure that it was something that actually protected students' rights and that they had a safe place in their school. We created legislation that would thoroughly support and enhance the rights of students and teachers within their schools.

7:30 a.m.

We heard loud and clear from teachers across this province that they needed stronger legislation that would support them in their ability to do their job. They didn't see outing children as part of

their job. Quite frankly, Mr. Chair, it isn't part of our job as human beings. Whether my profession is social work, politics, teacher, it is not my job or my place, for that matter, to out students. Having their simple human rights respected is not too much to ask. It's the baseline for where we should be starting legislation, and we had that in Bill 24. This piece of legislation being proposed as it is takes us back, which is absolutely not acceptable. It's 2019, and we know that GSAs save lives, full stop. Why we are putting vulnerable students at risk and putting teachers and staff in a position that would cause risk to some students is just simply not acceptable.

I know that as a social worker I've worked with vulnerable children within child and family services, and I worked in group care as well with children and youth that were in government care. These were children that weren't able to be at home for whatever reason, Mr. Chair. Sometimes it was something that was beyond their family's control. Sometimes it was, you know, supporting parents in a place where they needed to just work on themselves a little bit before they could have their kids return safely to their care. Working first-hand my entire career with vulnerable children, it's just heartbreaking to know that we're in a place in this Legislature where we're rolling back the clock and would put kids at risk.

Fundamentally, I believe that this is wrong. We know that a GSA saves lives. We know this. We know that kids, teachers, parents across the province, not just in Alberta but across the country, know that supporting vulnerable youth, specifically LGBTQ-plus children, makes sense. It's just something that as legislators we shouldn't even have to be talking about, Mr. Chair. I just wonder how many members across the way have sat down and talked with any of the students in a GSA or any of the support staff that help facilitate a GSA to talk about what's really happening at their schools, to hear first-hand from the children that are being impacted by this dangerous legislation that's being proposed. When you know, you have statistics, and you have testimony of people saying that GSAs save lives, how is it a question that we're bringing forward this piece of legislation today to talk about rolling back rights?

I think this amendment is a nice way to clean up the legislation. It protects youth and it protects staff so that they're not discriminated against. It's laid out very clearly in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The other members across the floor are saying that, you know, they're supporting GSAs. Their language is saying that when we ask them why they're doing this. They're telling us that they support GSAs. Supporting this amendment would show that they actually are supporting the GSAs in the province and are taking the Charter of Rights and Freedoms seriously, Mr. Chair. It would just simply enhance the piece of legislation under Bill Hate that is being introduced and give some clarity to their words.

I'm just very confused as to why the government is doing something that we know puts children's lives at risk, why they would create legislation that would directly impact our vulnerable population. I know as the chair for the conversion therapy working group – again, another example of what feels like an attack on LGBTQ people in our province. We have clear data and statistics and first-hand testimony of the dangers of not only getting rid of the GSA protections but also of the conversion therapy, Mr. Chair. Despite evidence, despite testimony, despite pleas from Albertans this government has gone ahead and just stopped that process. They will say that their doors are always open. They will say things like: this is the most comprehensive piece of legislation. That simply is not true.

When you talk to people in the province, they know that it's not true. They know that this is just lip service that's being provided and that it feels like it's an attack on the LGBTQ community. I hear

it all the time, Mr. Chair. When I was at several pride events during pride here in Edmonton, people are talking about their concern and their fear of what's happening with this government and this attack on the LGBTQ community and, specifically with this piece of legislation, our youth. I fail to understand the intentions of what this is. People have asked: why do you think they're doing this? I can't answer that. I honestly cannot say why this government is proceeding in the way that they are. It's hurtful, it's harmful, and people are at risk. I simply just have no words to explain why they would be making these conscious decisions, knowing that GSAs save lives.

Looking at this amendment, I would sincerely hope that members from government, all members look at this. It makes sense, Mr. Chair. It's a piece of legislation that would tighten up the rights to support our youth, our children, and our staff, which is what we know the Alberta Teachers' Association has asked for. They have said it very clearly not only when we did Bill 24; they said that Bill 10 put them in a horrible situation, that they were in a place where they didn't feel comfortable as teachers with this piece of legislation. They asked for more teeth to it, if you will, to talk about being able to truly create a safe space in their school for children, which is ultimately what the teachers are asking for. Our government listened to that, and we reopened that piece of legislation to make sure that it was inclusive and got rid of some of those loopholes, if you will. Not only is this government seeming to ignore the voice of LGBTQ-plus youth; they're ignoring the voice of teachers who are professionals, and this is what they do every day. They chose a career where they want to support children. They want to enhance their lives and, baseline, keep them safe.

This amendment enhances the bill and would allow that to come forward through the legislation. I don't understand why this wouldn't be supported, Mr. Chair. We are hearing loud and clear from parents, from schools, and from children that they need something in the legislation that will actually support students to be healthy and safe in their schools, and this will do that. They've asked that Bill 24 remain as it is, that it not be opened and changed so drastically because they're aware of the dangers of doing that. Why we're not listening is beyond me. We know that the way that it's being proposed weakens the legislation for GSAs in public schools. Private schools no longer need to submit policies at all, which is very confusing, why there's a discrepancy between public and private, and I'm unclear why this would be allowed other than that it's intentional to ensure that some of the schools don't have to put a policy forward. That's frightening. We've heard throughout the debate on this that the policy no longer even needs to have the word "gay."

**7:40 a.m.**

This amendment that we're proposing would ensure that students' and teachers' human rights and freedoms are being protected, which is a very simple request, Mr. Chair. They talk about inclusivity and support, and not being able to say the word "gay" doesn't support that. They're just very, I believe, misleading in some of what they're saying as opposed to what their actions are. Albertans know what the intention is behind Bill Hate, and we're hearing from the community all across the province, pleading with us to protect GSAs, to keep them the way that they are for our children's sake, for our parents' sake, for the safety of everybody that attends a school, whether it's public or private, in this province.

We also know, Mr. Chair, that the timely establishment of a GSA after it's been requested is being removed, which goes against the right of a student. If they don't have to create a GSA when it's being requested, how is that the most comprehensive piece of legislation? It's saying that, sure, the kids can come forward and ask for this,

but there's actually no accountability or timeline on the school to actually implement and create a group for these children to come and gather and feel safe in their own school.

I don't know what the government's intention is in that, other than that they don't see the value of having a GSA in the school when a child is asking for it. Having a young person bravely come forward and say that this is something that they need in their school – I think it goes even beyond a want – is heartbreaking for a young person who is trying to ask for support from the grown-ups in their lives. They find the courage to come forward and say: I would like a GSA; I would like to have some grown-ups show me that I'm safe in my school. To have the grown-ups in their life just simply disregard that and not implement it is heartbreaking. Knowing that a child or a youth is coming forward bravely to establish a GSA – it takes a lot of courage to be able to do that, to express when you are struggling and express a desire to have a certain group.

I can't imagine that a student that was asking for, let's say, a chess club would face those same types of discriminations, that they couldn't call it a chess club or that they would have an unrealistic timeline in place for doing that. Simply because it's a GSA shouldn't mean that a school can't move forward in a timely manner to support that request.

The name GSA, gay-straight alliance, shows that there's unity amongst students and that regardless if you're LGBTQ-identifying or someone who wants to come and support their friend, their peer, they can be involved. It just sends a message to our youth that they're not important and that they don't matter, and that's heartbreaking. They're a community that's vulnerable; they're a community that's isolated. To have that in their own school once they come forward and say that they need support – it's devastating that the adults who are there to ensure that they're safe and protected in their school can simply disregard that request. It's very sad, Mr. Chair. Again, I would think that this is a way to discourage GSAs and to not hold the school where it's being asked for accountable. There is no expectation that they comply with that.

Under this amendment it speaks to their human rights that are already established in Alberta and in Canada. I just don't understand not having enforcement mechanisms in place for not complying with GSAs. Why this is being removed, I think, speaks clearly that this government simply does not support GSAs. Despite all of their language saying that it's the most comprehensive and that they are the most supportive, it's just simply not true. This legislation wouldn't be worded the way it is if that was true. They would simply have left it alone as it stood. What our government did was make sure that the shell of Bill 10 was actually enhanced and supported and that the schools were accountable when asked to provide a GSA to students.

It's very confusing why they believe that this is being believed by Albertans. We hear that Albertans know that this isn't the intention, that they are removing the stipulation. They are not in a place where they are being truthful with what the intention is. Albertans see through that, and they are asking us to stand up and continue to fight, which is what we're doing, Mr. Chair. We are making sure that the voices of those who may not necessarily have a voice are being heard in this Chamber. I just hope that members opposite are listening to the pleas of Albertans when it comes to supporting GSAs in the province.

If they truly want to support the LGBTQ-plus community, doing something simple like this amendment should be supported. It makes sense. Like I've said, it already exists under the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Simply adding this in, if their intention is to do what they are saying, should be supported.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, on A3, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday rising to speak.

**Mr. Carson:** That's correct. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise on the amendment that is before us as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I appreciate this thoughtful amendment. I think it's a very important one, considering the discussions that have happened so far, and I do appreciate that the Education minister took a moment to stand up.

I do have some concerns with the points that the member raised. I think that the former Education minister, the Member for Edmonton-North West, raised some important points about the need to go further than what is in the current Education Act as proposed by this government. He just took a moment to look at some of the articles that have been put forward over the last few years, and I would be happy to table them in the nearest future, at my earliest opportunity. Unfortunately, I think it is very important for this conversation, so I will just read a little bit from there.

This one is titled *Alberta LGBTQ Teachers Say a Reversal of Bill 24 Could Hurt Them Too*. It kind of contradicts the conversation that the Education minister brought forward. It goes on to say that this teacher was attending a teachers' college, and it was quite explicit that they were told to try not to rock the boat and to keep their identity as a gay man a secret. He goes on to say, "Maybe you don't put a picture of you and your partner on your desk whereas if I was a straight teacher, I could proudly display pictures of my family." This teacher began teaching in 2016. In his first year he was openly out to his colleagues but not his students until the amendments that we brought forward under Bill 24 in 2017 affirming protections under the Human Rights Act for each staff member employed by all school authorities.

7:50 a.m.

I think that's an important point to make, because whether or not what the Education minister is saying is completely true, I think it's important that we go as far as we can to enshrine in legislation that these people will be fully protected. This teacher was very concerned that they would not be if this bill, Bill 24, was reversed, which we are now seeing.

In another article, which I'd be happy to table, titled *Former Principal Alleges Calgary Catholic School District Pushed Her Out over Her Sexuality*, it says that she served as a teacher and over a period of 15 years claims she reluctantly quit and is taking her concerns to the Alberta Human Rights Commission... [because of a] "Don't ask, don't tell" approach [that] was prevalent.

Of course, just the fact that these concerns are being raised on multiple occasions is enough to question whether the legislation under the proposed Education Act is going far enough. Further to that, I have concerns about provisions within the Education Act that's before us that leave the ability within regulations to exempt certain schools or certain school boards. When the Education minister stands up and says that the legislation will fully protect all schools across the province to the full extent, well, if you're leaving this space to, behind closed doors, have conversations about, "Oh, maybe this school board doesn't need to follow these rules the same as a different school board," whether that's the case or not, the possibility of that is offered within the legislation, which is very concerning and is one of the loopholes that we closed with Bill 24. I'd be very interested to hear the minister's comments on that.

I would also be interested to find out, once again, as the Member for Edmonton-North West pointed out, that these concerns were before that member at the time of being the minister. Now, I'm sure

that they're before this new Education minister, and I would be very interested to find out what that member's plan is moving forward.

There are concerns from teachers about protecting their ability to identify as LGBTQ or come out in the greater sense and be protected with legislation. What is going to happen or what are you going to do if you find school boards or school districts or administrators, whatever it may be, not following that? I think that's important. What reassurances can you give us that you aren't going to exempt certain schools that are potentially making agreements or contract agreements that are not necessarily protecting these staff the way that we would expect the legislation to do? Those are questions that I have.

Once again, I'm very concerned that the government is unwilling to even consider this amendment that's before them. It goes on to strengthen this gutted Education Act that has been brought forward by this government. That's very concerning. I think that if we can take this amendment that's before us and strengthen it, why wouldn't we? But, once again, it is because we have a government before us that is getting its marching orders from special-interest groups and that has not, to my knowledge, accepted any amendment that we've put forward, and they've all been very reasonable. I'm sure that we will have more reasonable amendments coming in the future.

Hopefully, we can get to somewhere where we can get support from this government. What we're doing here as the opposition caucus is providing educated amendments that have been consulted on for years, that were consulted on through the Bill 10 discussions and, once again, through the Bill 24 discussions. We made these changes because it was the right thing to do. For a government to come in and put everything, all of that hard work of not only our NDP government – of course, they disagree with many of the things that we talked about. I would hope that they didn't disagree with protecting LGBTQ students and teachers. But the picture that they're painting is a little different.

I really think that they should consider supporting this one because it has been consulted on. They have obviously done very little consultation on Bill 8 as a whole, that is before us. It's very frustrating. I hope that they might change their mind and support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, on amendment A3, I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen to speak.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you recognizing me to be able to add my comments again on this amendment, that's been proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

I must say that I found myself thinking back in history when the member was reading that one statement from that teacher. It actually got me thinking some time back, maybe to some of my actions even as far back as high school with some of the, you know, fellow students that were in school. How did I possibly treat them? Did I do what I could have to make them feel welcome and wanted in that school? I know, certainly, I had the privilege to be considered, I guess, sort of one of the leadership students there with the different sports that I played, the things that I was involved in. It always makes me wonder now: did I do everything I could to make sure that they felt welcome around me and welcome around the school?

Certainly, when we talk about our teachers, do we do everything to make them feel welcome around the school, you know, after hearing the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talking about that case where that teacher ended up having to go to court?

I guess I could ask the members opposite in general or maybe I'll just ask the Education minister to answer me this: do you think a school employer should be able to ask during the interview if the applying teacher is gay? Do you think that's an appropriate question? For some reason, in the case that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was talking about, the teacher was hired based on their qualifications. They were competent to teach, and it had nothing to do with them being gay, nothing whatsoever. So I'm just wondering. By this amendment we are saying to these teachers: it's safe for you.

I'm hoping that maybe the Education minister might be reconsidering the position taken in not supporting this amendment, because by not supporting it, we're essentially saying that we should, then, be able to ask during an interview process: "Are you gay? If we find out you are, well, maybe we can't exactly hire you because for some reason that has a direct influence on your ability to teach even though you went to school for years and received your credentials saying that you are capable of being a teacher."

To hear that the Education minister is not in favour of this amendment – you know, I've spoken at length on other bills and probably even this one as well. History and language. History teaches us a lot: what went on, what not to do in the future to avoid mistakes. As I've also said, language is everything, and I've heard the Education minister very clearly say – I would have to pull up *Hansard* to get the absolute, exact quote – that schools are expected to follow the policy. Expected. That's not a guarantee that they must follow the policy. We're kind of crossing our fingers, maybe even both, and hoping that absolutely every player is going to play by the rules. By bringing in this amendment, we are saying to all the players that you have to play by the rules. Otherwise, all we're simply doing is hoping that that will happen, and when one doesn't, well, I guess we'll deal with the fallout from that point.

**8:00 a.m.**

The problem with that kind of an attitude, Mr. Chair, is that damage has already been done. Like the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talked about, the damage was already done. The teacher had to go all the way to the Supreme Court to get it rectified, but how long did that take? Now, if we even translated that to the kids – I mean, we've heard: well, the privacy rules will protect everything. After the fact, after it's happened, and after the damage has been done. I've tabled two articles where we had an elected official that said: I'd rather have a dead son than a gay son.

**Mr. Nally:** That was supposed to be a tweet. You never did table it.

**The Deputy Chair:** Through the chair.

**Mr. Nielsen:** I did table it, Member, and you might as well go and read it. Have fun.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I'll take this opportunity just to remind everybody that in committee there's ample opportunity to discuss the amendment A3 or the bill after the amendment has been decided upon, so going forward, I will say that members should remember to put their comments through the chair.

With that, I will ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore to continue with his comments.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. As I was saying, when you have that kind of an attitude that's present and if it's one child – and the Education minister: I know that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has pointed out very clearly about the pin that I'm sure she proudly wears – that would put that one child at risk.

With regard to the amendment, are we willing to put that one teacher at risk? I would say that we shouldn't. It's our responsibility as legislators to ensure that everybody has a fair opportunity to prosper, and it doesn't matter where they come from, what their family's economic background is, what religion they follow, or who they love. It should not affect their ability to do the job if they are qualified to do it, and if you're interviewing somebody to be a teacher, I'm pretty sure that they've got those qualifications. This amendment will say to them: it doesn't matter if you're gay or not; the bottom line is that you're qualified to do the job. Otherwise, as I said, then we might as well be asking in the interview process, while you're interviewing: "Are you gay? Because if you are, I'm not going to give you the job." We might as well go there. I would be interested to see if constituents of the members opposite would agree with that wholeheartedly. It'd be interesting to find out. I think, probably not. This is a very, very common-sense amendment to be looking at.

Again, I've talked about language being everything, and some of the language that I've seen from the Education minister does not line up with the language that is being proposed in Bill 8. This amendment will attempt to fix that a little bit, but my concern is – and we've already seen some very common-sense amendments that would fix the language, so either people don't understand how language works or they're blatantly ignoring it and following what they're told to do, which kind of maybe goes a little bit contrary to some of the motions that we've seen here around voting with your conscience and being able to speak your mind. The problem is that I haven't seen anybody speaking their mind. I heard, though, that there was one member that was about to and very quickly got told to sit down.

If you're going to follow the language, then your actions have to also follow with it, and not accepting this amendment would say that your actions aren't following the language, which means, then, I have to question whether you're pandering to a small group of donors or supporters while putting others at risk, which means, then, I question why you're here in this House. Every day we talk in the morning about putting those kinds of things aside for the betterment of all Albertans. This amendment will provide a small group of those Albertans the safety that they need to be able to go into our schools, do their job, teach our young emerging leaders what they need to know so that when they get out into the world, they will be leading on the world stage, not following everybody else, not being like everybody else. Leading the world stage. I firmly believe that, Mr. Chair, about all of our students in this province. We have some amazing teachers.

As I said, I've got 26 schools in Edmonton-Decore, all three high schools in the north end. I get to talk to the teachers all the time, and some of my teachers have expressed concern about their colleagues. I've never had one of them name me, as they probably shouldn't unless that colleague comes out themselves first and says: hey, I'm gay. Not that it matters. I want to know if they're a competent teacher to teach our young emerging leaders. This amendment will provide some security for them. I hope that the Education minister, based on the language that I've heard, little pins, things like that – you now have to walk the talk, reconsider the position of not supporting this amendment, and take a common-sense approach: support this amendment, give those teachers the peace of mind they need so they can be focused on teaching our young emerging leaders.

I'm really hoping that maybe somebody on the opposite side will ask me that question that I asked earlier: do you think a school employer should be able to ask during the interview if the applying teacher is gay? By shooting down this amendment, that's pretty much what you're saying should be allowed to happen. I look

forward to seeing a response. I hope I get one, but, Mr. Chair, I'll have to say: don't be surprised if I don't hold my breath.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora rising to speak on amendment A3.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for what I think is a really important amendment. I want to start by saying that it was the ATA who said that they wanted to see the language that was in Bill 24 around teachers reflected in an amendment to the Education Act if the Education Act was to move forward, adding the words:

- (a) affirm the rights, as provided . . . [by] the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, of each staff member employed by the board and each student enrolled in a school operated by the board, and
- (b) contain one or more statements that staff members employed by the board and students enrolled in a school operated by the board will not be discriminated against as provided for in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I heard the minister earlier say: well, that's not necessary; it's redundant. My question is: if the government truly feels that it's unnecessary and redundant, then why not accept it? If it doesn't do anything new, then why not say, "Yes, we hear your concerns; we absolutely will protect all sexual minority and gender identity minority staff in our schools; not to worry; we will add this wording" if it is actually redundant?

**8:10 a.m.**

If there is reluctance to do that, it makes me wonder: is it because there's an alternative position here, a position that actually says, through some dog-whistle politics, the statement that was written by the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon when he was in the Wildrose caucus? I'm not sure if he was Education critic at the time, but definitely he was seen as somebody who had strong opinions and experience as a teacher and a member of the ATA. When that policy position was written and considered by the Wildrose, that talked about the rights of employers to discriminate against teachers specifically – or maybe it was all school staff. I think it was teachers specifically, based on their sexual orientation or their gender identity. I am concerned that by rejecting this amendment – if it is truly something that the minister feels is redundant, then why not accept it?

I think the reality here is that because there are other pressures within caucus, potentially, within the party, almost certainly – and I think that's truly concerning. If this is simply about updating language in a bill, then let's do that, and let's make sure that we act on the amendment that somebody with lived experience has brought forward in this House, somebody who herself was reluctant to talk about who she was because she didn't feel confident and safe in doing that at the time and now is in a position to create macro change and create a more respectful and loving environment for other school staff.

I also want to touch on a few people that I met in my time through education, and one was a teacher who I like a lot. When his partner passed away, he did not feel safe telling his school administrator why he needed to take three days off. He needed three days to plan a funeral and bury the person he'd loved for decades, but he couldn't tell the people he worked with because he wasn't sure that he would be able to keep his position. He definitely didn't feel like he would be supported, and I think that that's the opposite message we want to send to people who are serving our students and people who are serving our province. I am concerned by the reluctance to

accept an amendment that the minister herself says is redundant. If it's redundant, then why not accept it?

I want to take a minute. I've shared a few stories over the morning, and I want to take a moment to share another one, that was provided by Thomas Cline. Thomas goes on to say – I will be happy to provide copies to *Hansard* and then later table it when an opportunity presents itself.

The GSAs were so helpful to make connections with people and getting support.

It was halfway through Grade 10 when the GSAs came in and I hadn't yet come out, but I joined the group and was the only member who had come every week for the last half of my Grade 10 year.

GSAs are in trouble now, especially with the legislation coming in because all Bill 8 is going to do is cause an increase in mental health problems with queer youth and an increase in queer youth suicide and homelessness.

With parental groups wanting more parental control and want to be told if their child is joining [a] GSA, they won't know if their child is allied or if they are gay or queer and I think telling parents is a bad decision.

The support of the teachers and the GSA helped me feel comfortable enough to come out.

I'm extremely concerned because having a GSA helped me when I was in high school and these changes are going to hurt them.

I've said a few times in a few ways that GSAs: I think the evidence is very clear that they do save lives, they help academic achievement, and they help school culture of not just the students who are a part of them but create a more inclusive school culture overall.

The other piece, though, is that they also create a culture not just for the students but for parents and for staff to know that they are accepted and loved for who they are as well. There were a number of parents that I've talked to who said: "You know, when I showed up at the parent-teacher interviews, they said: oh, are you the aunt? And I said: no, I'm the mom. And they'd say: well, there's another lady who drops off this child at school, so we just assumed you were the aunt instead. And I said: well, there are two moms in our family."

The fact that parents are still explaining about these kinds of family structures when they show up to an interview that's designed for parents I think is not only unfortunate but I think it can be harmful and damaging, and I think that all staff deserve to feel that they will be protected and supported. No wonder they're asking for these amendments. The Premier has a very long track record of voting against LGBTQ rights, voting against them in the House of Commons and in work that was done before he was in political life as well. I guess it was still political life but before he was an elected official.

In asking for these amendments, when teachers ask us for them and when the ATA says that having that same language that was in Bill 24 would give their members the confidence that this isn't an attack on them, when the government is reluctant to make those amendments, it makes them feel like it's an attack on them. So if it truly isn't, then why not pass this amendment? It might not be fun to accept opposition amendments. I accepted a number of them when I was a minister because I felt like it was the right thing to do on more than one occasion. When we come to this place, we come here with an obligation to do good for the people that we were elected to serve.

When we gather every day, our Speaker takes the time to remind us. He says:

Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to her government, to the Members of the Legislative Assembly,

and to all in positions of power and responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power . . .

Love of power: that's an interesting line. I find that relevant to today's debate.

. . . desire to please . . .

Who are we trying to please by bringing in this bill and rolling back protections that we've created? I have a few ideas but would be willing to hear who it is, actually, that has the desire to please by rolling back these protections for staff, students, and families.

. . . or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interests and prejudice . . .

Certainly, I'm deeply concerned that there are a number of prejudices that are guiding this legislation and the reluctance to accept these amendments.

. . . keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

"Seek to improve the condition of all." Honestly, what the ATA, what teachers, what youth are telling us is: just don't make it worse. The Speaker calls on us every day to "seek to improve the condition of all," but these kids are saying: just don't make it worse. Just don't make it worse.

We've made a number of strides. We know that that makes some people uncomfortable, but these are strides in human rights. We need to keep moving forward. We can't move backwards. Let's seek to improve the condition of all, maintaining the condition where staff know definitively, because this language was put into Bill 24, that they are protected. How is removing that by passing this new bill and not allowing for this amendment improving the condition of all? It absolutely does no such thing.

In fact, it creates a lot of concern and a lot of nervousness on the part of many, so if it really isn't necessary, if it really is redundant, just accept it. Just accept the amendment. Sometimes it's good to take one from the opposition and say: "You know what? The role you played contributed to the improvement of this bill." We'll probably still say that it's not a great bill because there are a lot of things in it that we find problematic. This is one of them, and we're trying to bring forward an idea to make it less bad. I know a number of Wildrose members used to come to this House and sit where my right is now and say: you know, we're here to help. We are here to help. We're here to bring forward something that teachers have told us will help make this less bad.

**8:20 a.m.**

Please, I request that all members of this House take into consideration the motion that was passed yesterday about voting with conscience, the comments that were made by their leader in the lead-up to the provincial election about not legislating on social issues. I'm sure that many people who sought nominations believed the leader when he said that he wouldn't legislate on social issues. And here we are. It's Bill 8, and what's happening is legislation on social issues. We have an opportunity through this amendment to make it less bad, to make it less harmful, and to create more confidence for our staff, students, and families that we aren't moving backwards, that we're going to stay where we're at. Maybe don't move forward, but just stay still for a little while. If you're not going to seek to improve the condition of all, just seek to not make the condition worse for some. Sometimes that's a win – right? – just not moving backwards, not making things worse.

Those are some of the main points I wanted to make with regard to this amendment. I think that it is something that has the ability to help school staff feel more confident in their place of work, have students feel more confident in their place of learning – of course, we know that teachers' teaching conditions are students' learning conditions – making sure that the staff who are in that school feel

loved and respected and safe in being who they are and that that teacher could take three days off for bereavement leave to make sure that he could bury his partner. They are pretty simple things that teachers are asking for and things that they shouldn't have to go to the Supreme Court for to make sure are enshrined. They already did that. The case law has been determined. Please don't make them have to fight it again. Please make it crystal clear in this amending piece of legislation that their rights will be protected, that their minority rights will not be attacked yet again, and that they won't have to keep going to court to fight for their own right to be a part of a profession that they have chosen.

Those are some of the main things I wanted to say with regard to that. I do hope that folks have an open mind when considering this. I don't think people woke up this morning or yesterday morning or whenever they woke up and thought: I can't wait to come into the Legislature and roll back human rights. I just don't. I don't think that that's what inspires people to run for office. I think there's something else going on here. I think it's upon all of us to make sure that we ensure – and my colleague for Lethbridge-West talked about her friend who had his jaw broken because somebody thought he was gay – that we don't create those conditions, that we seek to improve the condition of all, that we create a more loving and just society. I also think it's important that we lead by example by making that consideration here today through this amendment.

Again, I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for the thoughtful amendment that she brought forward, that I think inspires a lot of us to think about potential other amendments that can be made in other areas of this legislation to make it less harmful and to really improve the condition of all in that workplace.

With that, I'll cede my time to my colleagues and thank you for your consideration. I'll say it once again just in case it wasn't heard: if this really does nothing, then what's the harm in passing it?

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, questions, comments on A3? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen to speak.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to address a few aspects of Bill 8. I had an opportunity to speak on a number of occasions, and now I enjoy the opportunity to speak to this amendment. Of course, as I previously indicated, I really support this amendment and encourage all the House to support this amendment because the thing that it does primarily is bring clarity to an issue that we shouldn't even be disagreeing on in the first place.

As has been mentioned previously, it isn't just the progressive side of the House that has been working on these kinds of aspects of provincial legislation that enshrine the Canadian Charter of Rights in our legislation. It's also been the Conservative side of the House that has done that over time in this Chamber. It's not asking something that is somehow in opposition to the values previously expressed by the Conservative side of the House. It would be nice to be able to see the House continue with the tradition that's been established. It reaches across the floor. It reflects the values of both of us. As a result, it would be a good place for us to join together and see some co-operative governance happen in the House.

It doesn't always happen here in the House when the opportunity arises for us to stand together and to support each other in making a declaration that helps to, you know, define Alberta as a place where human rights are protected and that helps us to establish a reputation in the world as a good, safe place where people of any nationality or race or religion or, in this case, sexual orientation can come and enjoy the benefits of being an Albertan and the benefits

of being part of this great country, that recently has been voted as the best country in the world and has been in that place a number of times over the last number of years, partly because we've made some pretty incredible advances in terms of the protection of people's rights, in terms of establishing the structures of society which allow us to ensure the well-being of all people.

You know, I think this is a wonderful opportunity for the government side of the House to stand together with the opposition side of the House and declare that in spite of the fact that we frequently have differences and that we often find reasons to argue with each other even when the differences are small, in this case there isn't an underlying value difference between us if we stand together on this, if we say that we actually believe in the Charter and in the Alberta Human Rights Act.

I know that the Minister of Education has risen in this House and has indicated that, you know, the things we're concerned about are somehow referred to or referenced in other parts of the act and that, as a result, somehow this becomes redundant, but my reading of the act indicates that specific reference to the rights protected by the Canadian Charter is not referenced in this act. What this does is that this provides clarity. This provides a specific reference to the Charter and the values inherent in the Charter that govern this act, which then allows us to identify that we have heard the Supreme Court decisions on these matters and, frankly, the national discussion on these matters that has occurred over the last 40 or 50 years and that we are responding appropriately to this.

You know, so often in this House we are at loggerheads, we're opposed to each other on issues, so having an opportunity to not be opposed but, rather, to be supportive of each other is one we should welcome. I'd like to do that in that spirit of reaching across the floor and trying to find that common ground for us to work together as we create this society that we want to have and that we wish everyone in the world were to have. It's a pretty great society. Compared to many of the other ones that people have to survive in in the world, in war-torn places or places where there are dictators or where there is a lack of rule of law or a lack of democracy, this is great.

In that spirit, I want to identify a number of areas in the act that I appreciate that you put in, that I appreciate you have included in Bill 8, so that you can see that I support some of the things you put into Bill 8, and then hopefully we can come to an agreement to include one more that we can all support on Bill 8.

**8:30 a.m.**

Let me just identify some of those pieces right now so that you can feel proud of some of the work you've done and know that this side of the House agrees with you and is happy that you have made these kinds of decisions to move forward. All of these are ones that are actually additions in Bill 8 to the 2012 act, so you're not simply going back to the 2012 act, as sometimes is said in the House, that somehow it's just a return to a previously passed act in this House that just was never proclaimed. In fact, you are changing things from that act. You're not just going back and saying: oh, we're just going to pick up where that one left off. You have made a number of decisions to alter the act from its original form, so we know that you're prepared to alter the act. We know that you have done so in some really positive ways. I'm going to identify at least three of them right now, and I just would like to add a fourth with this amendment.

One of the ones that I think is really important is the leadership and professional practice certification. In this case it updates the professional practice standards for teachers and school leaders and superintendents. All that is expected to be provided by September 1, 2019, so right away, this year. I think that's a positive thing. The

old 2012 act did not include all of that. It did have some reference to existing teacher qualification standards, but it did not have the full update of the professional practice standards for all teachers, school leaders, and superintendents and for education administrators. So there you are. There's one thing that you've added that, in fact, came pretty much from our bill and was inserted here, so you've obviously read some of the updates that we included in the Education Act and have found them to be positive.

Here we are agreeing with each other. Isn't that great? You've read our act, you've found places to agree, and you've included it in your act. So we know that that's possible. We know that we can work together to make an act better when we get together and we share ideas and we include that in the act. Thank you for that. Thank you for your work on the leadership professional practice certification.

Another one that I want to identify is the separate school district establishment piece. That is the changes you've made to update and to clarify the process for establishing a new territory for a separate or a Catholic school division. I appreciate that you've done that. It's very important. We know that under the Constitution of Canada Catholic schools are protected and Catholic schools cannot be eliminated or diminished in any way and they need to be supported. I think that's a really wonderful thing, so thank you. I appreciate that you've included that in the act.

I know that when we put our bill together, we actually spent a significant amount of time with the PSBAA and the ACSTA in consultation with the Alberta School Boards Association to look at exactly that question. We actually spent time in the community with the significant organizations, got together, and with the people who were being affected, we made some good decisions to provide clarity and to provide updates. As a result, it got included in the act that we introduced into this House. Here you have taken it almost verbatim and included it in this act. So thank you again. Again a place where good work was done with the community and with our policy developers: you have seen that, that that's a positive. While it was neglected – or I guess maybe “not mentioned” may be a better word – in the 2012 act, you've seen that that was an addition that was positive and included it in the act that you are bringing forward with Bill 8.

Here we have already two places where the work that was done by our government and the work that was done by your government have come together and formed a better act and moved us ahead in a positive way and as a reflection of sophisticated dialogue with the community members who were affected by this act. I find it just great to have an opportunity to say: thank you; continue the good work. These are important pieces of work that we want to continue.

Another one that I think is also important is the superintendent compensation piece, and that is that we made a decision in our 2017 School Act to bring the decision about compensation back to the Minister of Education so that the Minister of Education needed to approve the compensation. Of course, there were some concerns that the compensation as it was being negotiated out there in the community was not always reflective of where Alberta needed to be, that the compensation amounts were disproportionate to the monies that were being offered to other professionals in the field or comparable to people with other, similar kinds of responsibilities. And here, after we had put it into our act, again I find that in this Bill 8 you have adopted that. You've taken that strategy, a strategy which did not exist in the 2012 act, and added it in.

Here I am now with three different areas that I would like to say thank you to the government. I congratulate you on moving past partisanship and accepting changes that you see to be positive and to be furthering the cause of good legislation as it relates to schools in our province. Having done that, having found that common

ground on at least three occasions – and if I went through, I'm sure I could find a few other things that would also be reflective of melding together the work of two different governments from different sides of the floor into a better act.

I guess on that basis and with that history and knowing the positiveness that we have been able to achieve so far, I would ask that you add one more, that you increase the number of successes that we have here in this Chamber by one, and that is just to bring clarity to something that we already agree on. It's not something that we're fighting over. The underlying value that's inherent here is not something that somehow divides us. We both, your side and our side, believe in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We believe in the Human Rights Act, that was brought in by Conservatives here in this Chamber.

Given that we share those same sets of values, that we have a tradition on both sides of this House of furthering the protection of human rights, that makes Alberta and Canada such a great place to live, so that we end up on the top of the list of great places to live in the world consistently and we continue that tradition together in a positive, nonpartisan reach across the floor to achieve something good for all Albertans, I ask you to take a moment to deeply consider this amendment, that would allow us to make a substantial declaration of clarity on behalf of both the people who seek protections as members of an identifiable minority and, of course, people in the workforce who are seeking protections of their labour rights so that they can enjoy the fruits of a wonderful country, a wonderful province, and a history of achieving success on behalf of a greater society here in this Chamber, something that is noble, that is admirable, and that will help us all to stand up with our heads held high and declare to the world that Alberta is a great place to live. We welcome you here, and wherever you come from, whatever faith you have, whatever nationality you were born with, whatever job you hold, and whatever sexual orientation you have, you will find that you are protected and supported by a profoundly thoughtful government act.

Thank you.

8:40 a.m.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, comments on amendment A3? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen to speak.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to make some further comment on amendment A3 as brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I just want to acknowledge as well the perspective that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought to this Chamber. It made me think. You know, it edified me in a way because I think he very aptly pointed out the positive changes that we see reflected in the Education Act as brought forward by this government.

Earlier I was speaking metaphorically around the history of the Education Act and how it sat for a long time, with two governments, in regard to its implementation. It was passed, I believe, in 2012 but was not proclaimed either by the Progressive Conservative government nor our last government, although as I did mention, I did take a number of the useful and utilitarian aspects of the Education Act as it appeared in 2012 and built an amendment act to include a unified age of attendance, I think, for the age of entry for kids to enrol in kindergarten. We also assumed the revisions to the establishment of Catholic school boards, and I think that was definitely a positive change.

As brought forward by the Edmonton-Rutherford MLA's comments, these were all positive changes that, again, were subsumed and otherwise brought forward for review and debate as part of this Education Act, Bill 8. Again, you can see the evolution

over time of how legislation is built and how it is refined and how these things can take place over the course of different governments – right? – with the former Progressive Conservative government, with our last government, and here today with this UCP government bringing forward Bill 8.

You know, in the spirit of that idea, I just wanted to perhaps reflect, I think, on the urgency and the need for this amendment A3 to be considered here this morning. I believe that it is very much in the spirit of that evolution that we described, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and then as I'm just talking here now as well. I think the key here is to kind of remember where we were and how far we've come.

I know for a fact that when we were bringing through and compelling school boards around the province of Alberta to write and to implement safe and caring policies, it was a bumpy road. You know, it wasn't just, like: yeah, everybody was there, and we had 87 safe and caring schools policies that were just immediately coming forward from all the school boards. No. It took a lot of work, and I think part of the strategy that I employed was to make sure that individual school boards were writing their safe and caring schools policies themselves so that they were not just getting something from the provincial government, from Edmonton, and then having that imposed on them.

**Ms Hoffman:** Can I call a point of order?

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, of course. Absolutely. That's part of the game.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah. I'll call the point of order.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

#### Point of Order Decorum

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you. Point of order. Section 13(1) and 13(4), about decorum and order in the House. I understand that some people are coming and going, but I think it definitely doesn't respect the speaker who has the call when the Government House Leader comes into the House singing and chanting. I think that it's fun, but I don't think it's following Standing Order 13(1) or (4).

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you, hon. member. I am prepared to rule on this. I think that throughout these last 12 or so hours there have been some comments made, from both sides of the House, at different times. At this stage I'm not going to find a point of order. I will remind all members that when they do make comments, to make sure that they make them through the chair. I will take the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora into account with regard to making sure that order and decorum is of the utmost importance to ensure an effective debate.

We are currently debating amendment A3. I believe that it was the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West speaking. I would ask him to continue.

#### Debate Continued

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for, you know, perhaps reminding us in the most magnanimous and friendly sort of way.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Point of Order Relevance

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you. I really am privileged to have an opportunity to rise under 23(b). I'd encourage you to encourage the hon. member to speak about the question that's under discussion, which currently he's not doing. He wants to now speak to a point of order that you already ruled on, Mr. Chair, which is clearly a violation of the standing orders. I know he's probably getting tired as he tries to maintain his filibusters against things like royalty guarantees and Senate reform, and I appreciate that. But that's his job, so I'd ask him to get back on the bill at hand, please.

**The Deputy Chair:** If I'm not mistaken, you are referring to relevance.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I'm referring to relevance, sure, if that's what you'd like to call it. I'm specifically referring to 23(b)(i), debating the question that is under discussion. It says that the Speaker will call the member to order if he does not refer to the question that is under discussion. The hon. member is getting up and attempting to re-argue a point of order that you just ruled on, Mr. Chair, certainly not the question that is under discussion.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, you know, I beg to differ. I mean, we can look at the *Hansard* as it comes through. I was making reference to the way by which members, both Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-Decore and others, are helping to perhaps forward this argument, that amendment A3 is, in fact, relevant. I certainly stand by my comments, as I will continue to do so here presently, and look forward to continuing the discussion.

**The Deputy Chair:** At this stage I'm again not finding a point of order. There has been a wide swath with regard to debate up to this point. I would, however, take this opportunity, something that I was going to do, potentially, a little while ago, to remind people that there will be, obviously, ample time to debate the bill as a whole after we have debated amendment A3, which is currently before us. So I'd ask members, if they could, to try to ensure that they are effectively dealing with the amendment at hand so that once that is decided, then we can of course go back to the bill as a whole.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

8:50 a.m.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the clarification and so forth, and I must say that I'm feeling very strong and feeling very, I think, thoughtful and reflective on the matter at hand, which is amendment A3. I know that part of what we're trying to do here, I believe – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora I think framed the context of this amendment very well – is that we're looking for common ground.

I think about the insertion that amendment A3 does ask for in the Education Act in regard to the underlying importance of the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and how we underline that in regard to the protections that those two documents do afford each staff member employed by the board and each student enrolled in a school operated by the board as well.

Again, I think part of what we saw in a practical sort of way – I'll get back to my original point that I wanted to make, which is that when we were building the safe and caring schools policies or

compelling school boards to have safe and caring schools policies and to write them themselves, they were meant to, and eventually very successfully, build policy that protects students but protects staff as well so that you can see a symmetry that students and everyone and the public as well can see, a symmetry of protections for the integrity of a staff member regardless of their sexual orientation to be enshrined in the safe and caring schools policies that each school board was meant to build.

This took time, and it was a relationship that was served both by the Department of Education, through debate and reflection, and writing each individual school board. I mean, this wasn't an easy process, but I think that it really helped to internalize and to build policy that was in keeping with local needs of each school board. You know, Mr. Chair, when you actually do sit down and write something together as a community, then you internalize that much more strongly, and it becomes ultimately stronger and, I think, accepted by people.

Through that process, Mr. Chair, we managed to have excellent safe and caring schools policies that protected students and protected staff, written and developed and accepted by all public school boards here in the province of Alberta, all separate schools, Catholic schools and school boards in the province of Alberta, all charter schools, all francophone schools, and the vast majority of private schools as well. I believe that is the hallmark of a very successful process by which we make sure that people are included and that people are writing their own policies and moving through that process over time.

What underscores all of that process? It is to make sure that we build coherent law that's in keeping with what school boards manage to accomplish. I mean, obviously, we don't agree with resurrecting this Education Act to somehow move backwards in regard to safe and caring schools policies for schools and school boards around the province of Alberta. I believe that with this amendment at least we help to mitigate some of that lost ground that bringing forward the Education Act in its current form will definitely cause here in the province of Alberta. You know, by articulating the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms explicitly in this clause, I believe that we have helped to achieve that goal.

I'd like to thank a number of school boards who really helped to build safe and caring schools policy as a model, that allowed other school boards to see that it was possible, for example, to build safe and caring schools policy for students and staff and still, you know, make sure that you're retaining the individual character and the beliefs of each school board around the province. Edmonton public certainly did a lot of the leading work by creating a safe and caring schools policy that was quite remarkable, really, and once other school boards looked at this document and saw it being executed in the more than 220 schools in Edmonton public . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** I think we only had about 197 then. Somebody built a bunch of schools.

**Mr. Eggen:** Oh, that's right. We built so many more schools.

I think that once people saw those safe and caring schools policies writ large in our second-biggest school board in the province of Alberta, then that helped to really pave the way as well. I'd like to also acknowledge the work that Calgary Catholic school district did in regard to building safe and caring schools policy that also adhered to the statement of faith that that school board is founded on.

You know, again, we were just looking for leadership in this regard, but we also looked for direction. We also know that the work is not over – right? – because, of course, there are still

individual cases with staff and so forth feeling as though they had been maybe discriminated against and otherwise marginalized because of their sexuality. Again, I think that serves as a good reminder, Mr. Chair, about the importance for us to set a positive example here in this Chamber in making laws and regulations that reflect the need for more protections and for people to know that we have their backs covered and that if individual circumstances might arise around discriminatory employment practices, then we can help to protect those people.

But if we are sending a message that is somehow ambiguous or not clear or changing policy, then we're sending quite the opposite message. I think that that's not a good reflection of our responsibility here as legislators. I think that every step of the way we must make sure that people can hear loud and clear – underlined, underscored, all caps, right? – our commitment to both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act. I know that by moving forward on amendment A3, we can achieve that goal and others because, of course, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora reminded us – and I will say it again – we're here to help. We want to make sure that through collaboration we build legislation that reflects the values of who we are as Albertans, that reflects our responsibility to ensure that all people are protected in an equal and just sort of way. Accepting amendment A3 I think is a good way to express that sense of collaboration, and I encourage all members to vote alongside us to accept this amendment.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, on amendment A3, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

9:00 a.m.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I should say a happy Thursday and probably through you as well a happy Thursday to my hon. friends in the UCP caucus. Many of them travelled great distances to be here for what, well, could be our final week of the legislative session.

We've been working some long hours again this week, and of course for all members that does mean time away from our families, time away from our businesses, from volunteering, from groups, from many of the things that bring us fulfillment in life. That's the sacrifice that we took when we ran for public office, and we make that sacrifice in order to be part of something larger, and I think, actually, the Premier gave a similar speech to his caucus not too long ago.

I wonder if some of the members opposite, when the Premier isn't around or during those long hours on the highway, reflect on their role in this government, especially after last week when the Government House Leader successfully argued that those members are not actually part of the government at all. That's got to be demoralizing if you've travelled all the way from – I don't know – Central Peace-Notley or Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo or Vermilion-Lloydminster.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

#### **Point of Order Language Creating Disorder Items Previously Decided**

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Again, the hon. member, while trying to survive through his filibuster, spending his time trying to block Albertans being able to vote for Senators and those types of things, is using language that would create disorder in this place and also is debating a decision that

was already made by the House, yet again. He referred directly to it. He referred to the fact that the Government House Leader successfully argued – those are the exact words that he used – that there was a difference between cabinet and government caucus, which there is. There is a difference within *Beauchesne's*, within *Parliamentary Procedure*, but that does not mean that the government caucus is not part of this government team. Mr. Chair, we definitely are.

You could tell – while I understand what's happening across the way as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and others are getting ready for their leadership race, and of course you have a situation with their interim leader . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, I believe that I am prepared to make a ruling on this.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Within this, sometimes comments do ride up to the line within contextual ideas as to whether or not they could be considered parliamentary or not. In this case, I don't find that there was unparliamentary language that was . . .

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, 13(2), Mr. Chair. You don't find there's unparliamentary language about, again, standing order . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** With regard to your statement, before you get into that aspect of it, commenting on previous rulings, there is within context – you cannot debate previous rulings or re-create debate on that, but commenting in certain circumstances is acceptable.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, I'm sure you'll find that it will continue to create disorder in this Chamber if you'll continue to allow the opposition to behave this way. You'll witness it shortly.

**The Deputy Chair:** I'll take your comments under advisement. I think that it also does lend to the opportunity for me to remind the Chamber again that when debating amendment A3, there is ample opportunity once that amendment is decided to then debate the bill as a whole, and if members could ensure that they stay within the context of the amendment, that would probably do wonders with regard to ensuring that decorum and order are kept in check, which, in turn, for all of our benefits, then allows for effective debate on the matters at hand. I consider the matter closed.

Would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore please continue on amendment A3.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, I appreciate that. Actually, speaking directly to what I've seen as nonaction from some of our members in this House, I have to wonder, you know, why government members aren't speaking to the amendment. I think my comments are directly related to that and why I sort of referenced that because you might think that if, you know, you're not a member of the government, you might enjoy some freedom. But no, they don't seem to have a voice in this place beyond reading – I don't know – badly written notes that they're handed maybe by the government. These members at some point don't seem to be listening to debate on legislation since the government maybe told them to plug their ears.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order.

### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). It's also very rich for the hon. member to refer to implying motives towards other members of this House that they may or may not be listening to debate, particularly when the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein last time that we were in an all-night sitting pointed out the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who was using his computer to look at what he described as racy comics, those type of examples. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South, who was online shopping on his computer: there was a point of order discussed about this.

So I think the hon. member referring to that is inappropriate. Now nobody on this side of the House, of course, is doing that; it's his side of the House that's doing it. But the point is, Mr. Chair, the Speaker already ruled that that was inappropriate, and I suggest, again, that you caution the member that this will continue to create disorder if this continues to take place.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.  
The hon. Member . . .

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** . . . for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** I would think that there seems to be a proliferation of points of order from the member opposite. I'm not exactly sure why, but it certainly doesn't fit within the boundaries of the standing orders here in this Chamber nor does it contribute to, you know, clarification around the debate at hand. We're trying to work through something that is very sensitive and important, right? I know that this government claimed that they weren't going to legislate on social issues, but here we are up to our necks in debating social issues. I would strongly suggest that the member opposite stand down from his spurious points of order at this time.

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

At this stage with regard to the context of the comments that were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, I'm inclined to decide that there is not a point of order on that specific matter.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind members to speak through the chair and ensure that they are called upon before they discuss. That said, of course, points of order are always welcome.

I would, however, also remind members that using points of order to interject and engage in debate is not an effective use of points of order. That said, I am obviously not trying to dissuade points of order from being made, and we will rule on them as they come. I consider this matter to be closed.

Please, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. I think I left off somewhere around my comments – I mean, I could probably even go as far as, you know, not being able to introduce their own guests since we've decided to change, you know, a century-old tradition within the House. So I'm wondering if to this government they don't have much value beyond a seat from behind.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

### Point of Order Relevance

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I rise on 23 . . . [interjections]

**The Deputy Chair:** Again, please, keep comments through the chair to all members.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I rise on 23(b), again, "speaks to matters other than . . . the question under discussion." He continues to persist with that behaviour, Mr. Chair. I'll try it from a different angle.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** You can't call a point of order during a point of order.

**The Deputy Chair:** I'm prepared to speak here. First and foremost, you cannot make a point of order during the course of another point of order.

With regard to the swath of debate and relevance there such, there has been some breadth that has been allowed to all sides of the House, and as such, as I was listening to the comments from Edmonton-Decore at the time, I still believe that they were within the realm of context to the debate on the amendment A3. Going forward, then, on this point of order, I would say that the matter is closed.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore would please . . .

*9:10 a.m.*

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I rise on 13(2). Can you explain the ruling, why you're not enforcing 23(b), Mr. Chair?

**The Deputy Chair:** I would mention to the hon. Government House Leader that I believe that I am enforcing the rule that we just referred to. Whether that ruling is something that he agrees with or not, I would say that that ruling has been made. I do consider the matter to be closed.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore could please continue at this time.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Maybe we can get through more than maybe a sentence or two here of some of my comments here.

Well, I do know, when speaking to this amendment – again, we've been hoping to hear from members opposite around this amendment, around what their thoughts are. I believe that earlier this evening we saw the Member for Calgary-Falconridge stand to speak to the amendment which was brought forward, and I believe the hon. Transportation minister immediately told him to sit down, told him not to speak and – I don't know – maybe even how to vote.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order.

### Point of Order Imputing Falsehoods against a Member

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on 23 . . . [interjections] Again, the hon. member, who clearly has no respect for this place, continues to heckle during the point of order. But what's new with the NDP?

I rise on 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." You just watched that member stand in this House and say that the hon. Transportation minister tried to influence somebody's vote or order somebody to do something. He has absolutely no right to be able to say that. He has no evidence of any kind to be able to present to this Chamber. He's disrespecting an hon. member of this Chamber, Mr. Chair.

Now, that's what the NDP do. They're angry. They're angry people. We see it each and every day in here, but that's completely inappropriate. Again, I understand, as they all wave around and get ready for their leadership race with their interim leader that they have in this Chamber and get ready and fight amongst each other and try to posture for the leadership race that's coming, that this is maybe their approach, but they should not impute false motives on the hon. Transportation minister.

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

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much. Nobody did such a thing. If the hon. Government House Leader chooses to review the Blues, he will see clear evidence that there was a time where the Member for Calgary-Falconridge stood. He was called upon. There was some back and forth. I'm sure he can review the Blues. I think it was about 3 a.m. or 2 a.m., somewhere around there. Certainly, I appreciate his attempt to call a point of order, but there is no such point of order. It's simply a member restating the events of the evening.

**The Deputy Chair:** I do believe that in this case we have what I would consider to be a disagreement of facts. As such, I will allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore to continue. That said, I would ask all members of this House to be cognizant of the level of order and decorum in the House and whether or not their comments may be perceived to push that decorum in a way that may not lead to effective debate within the House. I think, as all of us will agree, our goal is effective debate.

As such, if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore could please continue.

#### Debate Continued

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you. Let me conclude with this. I would like to wish you, Mr. Chair, a happy Thursday.

Let's carry on with this debate. Hopefully, we'll see some government members get up to actually speak to it because I know, on this side of the House, that severely limiting that ability to do anything to support their constituents is a disservice to them. I would hope that we will see some comments of any kind, other than, of course, points of order, that will help our constituents understand some of the failings of this bill in certain areas.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, very much for your patience.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen to speak on amendment A3 to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to A3, the amendment to the Education Amendment Act, 2019, brought forward by a member from this side of the Chamber. Now, I've been listening to the debate that's been going on around Bill 8 in general and specifically to this amendment, and I have to say that I agree with a lot of what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had talked about when he spoke to this a little earlier this morning. He talked about a history of collaboration in this Chamber and about some past experiences where members from opposite sides of the House have brought forward amendments and have been supported in this Chamber by all members of the House. When an amendment makes sense, when it's clearly moving forward with legislation and it's being inclusive and supportive – that's the history that we have in this Chamber. So I'm hoping that, with this amendment, we see that again in this Chamber.

This is too important to our youth and our teachers and our support staff to not support this amendment, which simply states:

(3.1) A policy and a code of conduct established under subsection (2) must

- (a) affirm the rights, as provided for in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, of each staff member employed by the board and each student enrolled in a school operated by the board, and
- (b) contain one or more statements that staff members employed by the board and students enrolled in a school operated by the board will not be discriminated against as provided for in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to do a little bit of a history lesson when we talk about collaboration in this Chamber and ways that both sides of the House have been able to come together and agree when something has come forward by someone that perhaps isn't government. In Bill 202, the Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, it is written:

The presence of gay-straight alliance groups will reduce the risk of bullying and suicide for all students; and

Whereas other Canadian jurisdictions have recognized the need to enact similar legislation to protect the human rights and dignity of young persons in schools.

Mr. Chair, this was voted in under a Conservative government five years ago. A Conservative government supported this. Now we're at a place where a Conservative government is government, and they want to roll back the legislation that was brought forward, when five years ago this was a motion that was supported by a Conservative government. By having this act amended, as was proposed by a member on this side of the House, I think it would show that this Conservative government is supporting GSAs. We've heard members speak to this, saying that they are supportive, that it's the most comprehensive legislation. I would argue that by supporting this, that we've heard members say is redundant, there's no harm in including this amendment in the legislation the way it's written.

I really hope that all members in the Assembly can come together, like had occurred in 2014, and support this piece of legislation being amended by a member from this side of the House. It speaks to simple human rights that are acknowledged in Alberta and in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that already exist. By including this in the language of Bill 8, it could only clarify, Mr. Chair, what the government is intending to do.

**9:20 a.m.**

I've spoken in this House before about some of my concerns with legislation that's come forward and about power dynamics that are being created while the government is introducing legislation. I see this as another power dynamic, Mr. Chair, knowing that in order to have a student implement a GSA, there's a whole bunch of hurdles that have to be overcome that not every student may be equipped to handle. It's concerning knowing that this was perhaps intentionally structured that way.

When I spoke to this before in the House, on Bill 2, it was talking about livelihoods being on the line, Mr. Chair. Right now, with Bill 8, lives are on the line. We've heard members from this side of the House talk at length about the life-saving supports that a GSA in a school provides to students and the impact that it has on staff as well if they are from the LGBTQ community. Knowing that their rights are also protected is essential. We've heard over and over from teachers and school staff that they simply do not want to be put in a situation that this legislation would create. It's really frightening that the government is wanting to move ahead with this

despite hearing from professionals, from students, from parents, from families, from Albertans about their concerns with moving forward with this.

By accepting this amendment, it would show that there is some agreement on both sides of the Chamber. I think it's essential that the government listen to some of the amendments that are being brought forward by the opposition, not just simply have a mindset that it's just going to be opposed because it was brought forward by a member of the opposition. We've seen where members of all parties can bring forward reasoned amendments and they're supported by the government because it makes sense, and there's evidence to support why this amendment going forward makes sense, Mr. Chair.

When we have been talking about this in the community, I have had people coming forward to me expressing concern about how Bill Hate has been written. They're pleading with members of the opposition and the government to make amendments, if this bill is going forward, to make it better, to actually support GSAs in the schools and not go against human rights and safety of students and teachers.

I had a constituent reach out to me asking not to be named. They wanted to share their story, so I would like to share that. They knew that we were speaking to Bill 8 and that we were proposing amendments that we believe would help support GSAs and all students as well as staff, teachers in the schools. I would like to read it out, Mr. Chair. They start by saying:

I would prefer to not be named . . . if that is okay.

I work for the government, and I always feel very vulnerable acknowledging I am transgendered – at the same time, now more than ever, queer people do need to speak up.

I am transgendered. I grew up in a stoutly catholic family with parents who, like our education minister, had extreme difficulty acknowledging the existence of people who are different (since it's so hard to actually be able to name and say that transgendered and homosexual people actually exist).

The largest and most commonly accepted study of transgendered people to date found that 43% of people like me have attempted suicide.

The same study found that family acceptance lowers suicide attempt rates to the same as the regular population.

Where people's families (like mine) do not accept gender variant people, homosexual people, and people who are different, kids struggle like I did.

A GSA would have made a huge difference in my small town 1990s Barrhead upbringing.

While I might not have come out widely, I also would have been way less likely to have self mutilated as much as I did.

I would have felt better about myself. I would have come to terms with what I am at a younger age and in a much healthier fashion.

Bill 8 is an attack on GSAs.

Bill 8 is an attack on children.

Glibly pretending to struggle to find the words to name LGBT people and then calling them "whatever" instead of even having the respect to acknowledge them as people does not erase their existence.

Doing so also fails to reduce the numbers of LGBT people in Alberta.

That was sent to me, like I said, by a constituent who is terrified about this piece of legislation going forward as it is. This brave person is an adult and talks about suicide and the higher rates that occur in transgender communities. This is something that we can't argue. It's fact, Mr. Chair.

Being in a place of being able to make legislative decisions and knowingly making a decision that is going to put people at risk is simply unacceptable. When we look at the amendment that was

brought forward, it simply makes sense, and hearing that it's redundant is not a reason to not support this reasoned amendment, Mr. Chair. It should be self-explanatory that if it's redundant, there should be absolutely no harm in government members accepting this amendment. If they feel that it's already addressed in their bill as it is, then accept the amendment. I don't believe that that's an argument as to why it shouldn't be supported, saying "because it's already there." It just doesn't make sense to me.

I think that having this clarity in the bill is a small step to showing our youth and our teachers and our school support staff that their rights matter, that their human rights matter, and we're going to ensure that it's put in the legislation to clarify that, because when a student is asking for a GSA, they have the right to do that. They have the right to be safe in their school.

The teachers are asking for clarity around some of this legislation and are afraid that they're going to be put in a position where it's not supported by the board or supported by the principals that are governing the school when a child asks. Knowing that one child comes forward and asks for a GSA and perhaps one teacher supports that decision, that teacher might be up against administration that has no responsibility to move forward with implementing that GSA. It just creates an unrealistic, unfair disadvantage for our children, and I think that having the clarity that this amendment provides is essential and is something that all members should be able to support.

I like that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford went through the legislation and highlighted some of the areas of this bill that we support and that we can get behind and say: you know, this is a great addition to the Education Act. But we've heard loud and clear from members of the LGBTQ community, from allies, from faith leaders, from community members, teachers, support staff, parents, kids that this piece is not okay. It's not acceptable. What we're trying to do is to make it a little bit better.

**9:30 a.m.**

We know that there's been a history of government to date pushing through legislation regardless of evidence that's being provided to show that it might not make sense the way that it's been presented, and perhaps it could be amended. I think this is a great opportunity for that to occur, Mr. Chair, knowing that there is research behind the supportive impacts of having a GSA in the school and knowing that there's an ability to just highlight the protections that already exist under the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It makes sense. Having it clarified in the legislation is a small step forward in being able to move forward with this Bill 8.

I know that teachers across the province have been reaching out to government and expressing concern. They've been reaching out to my office, and I know that they're CCing the Premier, the Education minister, other members pleading for there to be some sort of changes that come forward in Bill 8.

Recently, I've heard from a teacher in my community, Mr. Chair, who felt it upon herself not only as a teacher but as a mom to come forward and express some concerns about many things that this government is doing but, specifically knowing that we are debating Bill Hate and that we're fighting for our LGBTQ youth, felt it important to reach out specifically about this piece. She sent me an e-mail, and she says:

I've been a teacher for almost 10 years. One thing that is supported by both research and my experience, students require their basic needs to be met in order to learn. This includes food, warmth and it definitely includes safety; when students don't feel safe at school, it's not that they don't learn, it's that they can't learn.

Teachers have a responsibility to create a safe space to help students learn to the best of their ability and GSAs help this happen. They let LGBTQ students know that each and every one of them is valuable and deserving of the same acceptance and opportunities as every other student. One teacher can make a difference, but this can be thoroughly undermined by an administration that does not show full support.

I see how many people have contacted [government] about this issue, I see it all around me; can you, the elected representatives, in good conscience ignore these concerns? Can you put this bill forward as is and truly claim it is in everyone's best interests? You claim [you] want to improve students' academic performance, do you understand that this is taking you in the wrong direction?

This government can send a message to every student in this province by making GSAs immediate and automatic; it tells every child, especially LGBTQ students, you are valued, you are accepted, you are safe. Doing anything else is telling them the opposite.

This amendment is doing exactly what my constituent is asking. It's clarifying, enhancing the legislation. On behalf of her and so many others we're pleading with government to accept the amendments that we're introducing to make this bill a little bit better and to make it supportive of GSAs and supportive of our students that are asking for them and supportive of our teachers and all of those employed by the school and the board, to put them in a place where it's clear what the expectations are and what the human rights are.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for those comments on amendment A3.

I would re-remind all other members of the House that we are on A3. As such, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise again to amendment A3. I think it's a very important amendment, as has been discussed by the members on this side of the House. Once again, I would like to hear more comments from the government side. I think it's important to have a fulsome debate on this and hear from more of the government members why they are or aren't supporting this piece of legislation.

Once again, I appreciate the Minister of Education standing up for a few short moments and discussing why they won't be supporting this amendment, but once again I still have the same concerns that I raised earlier and that were raised by the Member for Edmonton-North West, around loopholes that we're seeing. I mean, the minister says that the topic that's brought forward in this amendment is already covered within the legislation. We brought forward some more questions around provisions within the Education Act that exempt or potentially exempt, through regulations, the responsibility within this amendment when it comes to private schools or charter schools. That's definitely a concern.

That was a concern that was there when Bill 24 was introduced, and that's why it extended that legislation to private schools and to charter schools. Once again, there was a conversation that continued on when we were in government, when the NDP was in government, because we had certain school boards that weren't willing to follow the legislation that we put in place. We said that we were going to take action. Of course, with the election turning out the way it did, things changed. Once again, my question to this Education minister is: what are you going to do? If you're going to enforce the legislation that you have before this House, if passed, what are you going to do when these school boards come back to

you and say, "No, we are not going to allow GSAs to be formed"? We had that happening. I would still like some clarification on that answer.

I would like some clarification on how this is redundant when the minister's own legislation leaves a loophole in the fact that school boards will be able to sidestep it, potentially, through regulations. I would also like reassurances that the minister is not going to, in the near future or the future, exempt some of these school boards from having to follow through on their obligation through this legislation and on their obligation through Alberta human rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I just want to touch back on a conversation or an article that I raised earlier that I'm more than happy to table at my earliest convenience, just a quote from it. It says:

While a key piece of Bill 24 is the protection it provides for the privacy of students who are part of a gay-straight alliance at their school, it also spells out specific protections for staff members under Section 45.1, in accordance to [the Alberta] Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and [specifically] extends those protections to private schools.

There are concerns that with the changes that are put forward by this government and by this minister, those protections will no longer be in place. If the minister truly believes in their heart of hearts that this is strong enough protection, then they need to reassure these teachers and these administrators that are concerned that this is, in fact, weakening the legislation, that that's not the case.

**9:40 a.m.**

I want to continue here.

This "works to echo and reinforce – and arguably extend – obligations not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or other grounds."

That was said by Jessica Eisen, a law professor at the University of Alberta. Jessica also added:

Bill 24... provides alternatives to costly and lengthy Human Rights Act processes...

something, I think, that should be of grave concern to this government. I mean, we already know that there are expensive costs to pushing these to courts, and just like we don't think students should have to go to court to fight for their human rights after the fact that they've been discriminated against, I don't think that the best recourse should be for a teacher to also have to go to court.

Here we have two instances where instead of putting in legislation on the front end protecting both teachers and students from discrimination, the minister is asking them to go to court and go through that lengthy and expensive process. That's very concerning to me. Once again, I really hope that the Education minister, who – I'm happy – took a moment to speak to this amendment, will stand up again and clarify some of these concerns that we have because they are very concerning. Teachers and educators across the province do want to have reassurances that their rights will be respected and that they won't have to go to court to have their rights respected.

I do just want to quickly touch back on correspondence that was received by my office. I believe it was quoted at some length by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Just a short quote here. The constituent said: "We know that some educators are uncomfortable with the word 'gay.' What this means is that these adults are uncomfortable with the idea that gay people exist at all and therefore use their discomfort as a way of making invisible not only the LGBTQ2 population but also their specific concerns around safety and inclusion." I think that's something that's very important as we discuss the gutting of Bill 24 and the introduction of Bill 8, which would replace it.

We as legislators, for the most part, are coming from places of great privilege, so when we stand up and say that teachers didn't have issues before Bill 24 or educators are fine with Bill 8, it's coming from a place of privilege. There are many instances that we've seen, that have been shared by the opposition caucus here, where teachers, whether real or perceived, felt that their rights were infringed upon. I think that as this conversation goes forward, once again the Minister of Education needs to provide clarity that these rights will be protected.

I mean, we heard from the minister that FOIP and PIPA are strong enough protections, but once again we don't want to get to a point where we're fighting in courts an issue that is really just common sense. Don't discriminate against students that want to form a GSA, don't discriminate against students that identify as or are members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community, and don't do it to teachers. There's no need to do it because, you know, we just need to have some more respect for each other, and we can avoid a lot of court costs, the fact is.

Once again, I think that this is a common-sense amendment that has been put forward. I would really be interested to hear why or if the government is supporting it or members of the government caucus will be supporting it. Why or why not? It's been quite quiet on that side of the House other than what happened a few minutes earlier, of course, but I'd be very interested to hear more from the members.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, on A3, the amendment that we are on for Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford standing to speak.

### Chair's Ruling Repetition

**The Deputy Chair:** I would also just take a quick moment and caution members that when quoting from, as an example, correspondence and then later tabling that document or documents, in order to ensure that we have effective debates, to not perhaps read the same quote several times. Once it's in the record, then that portion of debate could be construed as being completed, I guess. I thought I'd make a quick mention of that to make sure we have an effective debate going forward.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I believe, was looking to speak.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate this opportunity, and I take to heart your caution about reading things more than once into the record, so I shall endeavour to not do that in the time allotted to me right now.

I have had an opportunity to rise and speak to this amendment on a couple of occasions already. Each time I rise, I take a slightly different focus to the amendment and the requests that I have of the government to participate. The first time I rose, it was really around the protection of human rights and my concern about the fact that, you know, we've spent a lot of time as a society establishing and creating human rights as a fundamental part of our national character and the combination of human rights along with our reference to the rule of law and our democratic processes and ensuring that this is a safe and good place for all of its citizens.

I spoke earlier about the fact that those benefits are not widely shared around the world, unfortunately, although I do believe that the arc of history does bend toward justice, as has been commented

on earlier in the House by the Member for Lethbridge-West. I do think we are headed in that direction. Unfortunately, as with most progress, it's not a single vector. It often has movement forward and movement back. As we know with liberty itself, the price of it is eternal vigilance, so that's true about a variety of other aspects of our modern world such as human rights, the rule of law, and democracy.

I'm very proud to be one of a number of people standing up in this House and declaring ourselves prepared to spend a great deal of time protecting the achievements that have been garnered through the efforts of many people in this Chamber over many years, including, as I have mentioned before, not just members of the progressive parties but also of the conservative parties who have introduced some of this legislation into the House.

I appreciate the opportunity that I've had to speak to the question of human rights. The last time that I rose in this House, I used it as an opportunity to congratulate the government, to speak about some of the additions that they have put into this bill that were not present in the 2012 bill that they are referring us back to now and the fact that they clearly had paid attention to the amendments that were made and the construction of the bill and found within things that they could agree with and things that would actually improve the act as it's introduced here in the province of Alberta and as a result have, maybe somewhat accidentally, reached across the floor and shared some common values, similar to the ones that I have mentioned, like the rule of law and human rights, and have used those to make this act better.

I think that this amendment is one that will add to that, that this amendment is a continuation of the good work that can be done when positive suggestions are brought forward by the opposition to help an act reach a higher bar and to achieve something that would not have been achieved if there was a narrow, blinded vision to suggestions from people across the floor merely because they are across the floor.

*9:50 a.m.*

Having had an opportunity to speak to those two issues in my previous times rising during this Committee of the Whole, I would now like to move on to a third area of concern for me related particularly to this amendment, and that is that the objections to this amendment seem to be part of an ongoing pattern by the government over the last number of weeks in that they appear to be choosing to engage in parliamentary procedures resulting in acts that lead to setting up future litigation on the acts themselves, knowing that if they establish something now, those things that they establish will be challenged because we have a history of them being challenged already in our society and have gone through due process both within the parliamentary system and in the courts system, and as a result are essentially preventing the enactment of decisions that have already been made by the Supreme Court, already have been made by members of this House in this Chamber and Chambers across Canada and Houses across Canada, Legislatures, and the House of Commons.

I'm not quite sure why this government is choosing to use future litigation as an alternative to just simply adopting pieces into the act that will clarify and make better the act based on agreements we've already made as a society as to where we would like to be. I notice that this has happened a number of times, that they have simply chosen to plug their ears and blind their eyes to the decisions that have already instructed us into the position that we are in right now in society.

For example, in Bill 9 we know that the Supreme Court has already made judgments on these union activities and collective bargaining, yet in that case they chose to do it anyway, knowing

that there would be future litigation and that eventually their decision here today would be overturned in the future, having wasted a lot of money, having wasted a lot of time, and having wasted a lot of the energies of the government of Alberta and all of its public and civil servants.

This refusal to accept this amendment is similar. It's similar in that we know now that whatever this government chooses to do, ultimately what will reign supreme is the Supreme Court decisions, the Supreme Court decisions that uphold the Charter of Rights. I think if the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is being violated, then obviously this will go through an extended process of years. I remember when Mr. Vriend was fired from The Kings college, The Kings University now. That process took over 10 years to be resolved. For 10 years the province of Alberta was part of a conflictual process that cost this province a considerable amount of money and resulted in serious delays in moving forward with the agenda that we knew would need to move forward anyway.

I'm concerned that in this case we've done the same thing, and they could resolve it today. They could resolve it by adopting an amendment that brings clarity to the acceptance of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They could do that right now. They could do that in a matter of minutes and save this province and save the people affected by this kind of decision, perhaps as in the case of Mr. Vriend, 10 years of litigation and difficulty, which is not something that I think we should be putting our citizens through. Yet here we are in this place where we could stop that right now by adopting this amendment.

I notice this trend again was repeated in this same act when we tried to introduce an amendment that would ensure that GSAs would be set up immediately and that children would not be outed to their parents. The minister at the time stood up and said: we've gone to the Privacy Commissioner, and the Privacy Commissioner said that that will be a violation of privacy laws and regulations and that if that were to happen, then students, typically under the age of 18, minors under the law, could actually challenge the violation of their privacy rights after the fact and take years in the process. We know that appeals to the Privacy Commissioner often take a year or two years in order to get things rectified.

You can't put the genie back in the bottle. Once your privacy has been violated, you can't make it unviolated. You can be proven to be correct by the Privacy Commissioner, but you can't actually fix what went wrong. You can just simply prove that it was wrong so that you would hope that people in the future would be less likely to engage in that kind of behaviour again. It doesn't actually help the individual at all.

Here we are again. In this act we are setting up a circumstance where the government is actually trying to encourage litigation against its own bill, its own act. They're setting up circumstances where the only response that individuals have in order to have their rights reflected and honoured is to actually challenge the government and take on the government at great expense and for the great number of years that it would cost to do that. I don't know why a government would choose to set themselves up for future litigation. That's why I think this amendment is very important. This amendment will help to stop the trend the government has set itself upon. This will stop the government from setting itself up for a course of extended fighting with their own citizens and litigating things we already know the answer to.

We already know how these things will be decided once they get through the processes that the government says are available to people because we have been down that road before in this province. We've set the precedents. We've had the cases. We've had the Vriend case in this province, debated in this Legislature, brought to the courts in this province, and subsequently brought to

the courts in the nation. We've been down that road. As the kids would say: been there; done that. I'm too old to say it myself, so I have to attribute it to younger people.

I think it's really important that we understand what the intention of this amendment is and we understand that this is not a slam against the government. As I've already articulated in previous times that I've risen here in the Chamber overnight, last night, we actually have an underlying agreement here between our sides. We all believe in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Because we have a shared underlying value, it would make sense for us, then, to not set up a fight between us, to not create a circumstance where here we are having to fight this over and over again, having to speak on the same issue all night long, as we have a number of times throughout this Legislature because the government just somehow doesn't want to include things that are being introduced in the Chamber by this side of the House. Yet we know that they've included some of our other amendments that we had put in our bill that were not in the previous 2012 bill. So we know that they can. If they're not trying to somehow save face, or whatever it is they're trying to do, they can hear suggestions and adopt those suggestions. In fact, some of them are adopted almost verbatim from our bill. We know that if they do that, then it improves the bill. They obviously believe it improves the bill. I was able to speak to three different times in the current bill, Bill 8, that reflect the previous act, that we as a government established in this province. So we know they can do that.

*10:00 a.m.*

It's a mystery. It's confusing to us to see that instead of taking the high road of choosing to work in a nonpartisan way, to build a better act, and to avoid future litigation, they are refusing to add a few simple words for clarity, to adopt within this act a specific reference to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. A simple thing to do. It's not like we are asking them to include reference to NDP doctrine or our constitution for our party or something that they might object to. We're asking them to include reference to an act in a bill that they have already acknowledged they agree with.

I would truly like to see the government step up to be the stand-up kind of people that we need and to reflect in their behaviours the long tradition that has been built up in this province and, of course, in western democracies around the world of supporting human rights, the Bill of Rights, labour legislation, all of which have been supported by provincial governments, the federal government, and, of course, the federal courts, the Supreme Court of Canada time and time again. I would be discouraged to sit back and watch, as I did with the Vriend case, the government waste the time and the money for 10 years to resist something that was inevitable. And here they're choosing to do it again.

I'm not sure why they want to go back in time. I'm not sure what was good about the past, so much so that they want to ignore the progress that we've made, that somehow there is this magic era back in our youth or, in the case of some of the members of the House, before they were even born, where somehow things were all perfect and rosy and good, because we know they weren't. We know they weren't because of the hard work that's been done by people like Mr. Vriend, by members of both sides of this House over the last 30 or 40 years to try to achieve a better world, a better world not only for those of us who are here in Alberta but, by virtue of teaching the world, a better world for people all around, reflecting the progress we've made and understanding how to create a society that actually is best for all people, including, of course, those people who are most vulnerable and need the structural protections of the rule of law.

That's all we're asking here. That's what governments do best, create those kinds of structural protections. That's what I'd like to see here in this House today by the simple inclusion of this amendment in the bill, which just identifies something that we all agree on and provides clarity to anyone who may be in doubt of the stance of this particular government, as opposed to previous Conservative governments, and maybe is fearful for themselves, fearful for their employment, fearful for the protection of their sexual orientation rights, and is concerned with the direction of this government.

I'll wrap up my comments and thank the government for listening in advance. I hope and anticipate that they will take the time to support this amendment.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West rising to speak to amendment A3.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your time and consideration in regard to this amendment A3. I do want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford once again, who helped to put these issues into context. You know, so often we think that we've progressed to a certain point in our society and with conventional wisdom that says that, yeah, we will accept teachers that might be gay, lesbian, transgendered, and so forth and that we've moved past that sort of overt discrimination that we have seen in the very recent past, but these are only things where you can achieve a sense of equality and justice and fairness through enshrinement in law and in the execution of that law with individual cases. It can be delusional to think: oh, well, conventional wisdom says that we're past all that, and the Vriend case settled the issue around discriminatory practices by employers generally and education institutions specifically, discriminating on one's sexuality.

You know, these are hard-won battles. Without enshrining and allowing these things to gel in our schools, it's so easy to step backwards, to make steps backwards. We saw as recently as January of this year a number of people stepping forward, saying: yeah, I have felt discrimination by my school board around my sexuality, and I've been instructed quietly to make sure to get back into the closet, quite frankly.

You know, I was compelled as Education minister at the time to compel a review of individual employment contracts because these cases were popping up on a much more frequent basis. Since that time, of course, we've had a change of government, and I'd be curious to ask the Education minister: what did you do with those files, right? Are they sitting on your desk? Are there more outstanding cases whereby individuals were compromised because of their sexuality? Is that part of the hiring process that is still being employed in some corners of our province today?

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I did watch with interest and I did collect those contracts and, you know, we reviewed them. I mean, we have to be clear that the vast majority of employers are scrupulous and follow best practices and they're, quite frankly, well within the law. But our job is to ensure that everybody is within the law.

When we bring forward legislation such as Bill 8, which is clearly a step backwards – I've said this before in the House. There's the letter of the law, and this government has argued up and down that they've made practical changes to ensure student safety and so forth, but people know that this is a step backwards. There are some people that may have been held down by what has been happening

with Bill 24 and the letter of the law and the progress that we've made but that will see Bill 8 as an opportunity to return to those regressive practices of discriminating against teachers based on their sexuality and perhaps suppressing and dragging, ragging the puck on forming a GSA and so forth, and they're just waiting for that signal which Bill 8 could give to, you know, head back in time and return to those regressive and discriminatory practices.

You know, I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford as well for just reminding us of how recent some of these hard-won battles are, quite frankly. I got a personal sense of that last September, I think, during the Calgary Pride Parade. The Pride Calgary organization chose to make GSAs in Calgary collectively the parade marshals for that particular parade. It was amazing. I've never seen such enthusiastic participation by the city of Calgary in regard to the Pride Parade or any parade, really. I think there were more than 70,000 people on the streets. As I say, the organizing committee chose GSAs in Calgary to be the collective parade marshals for that event.

*10:10 a.m.*

I was up at the head of the parade with various GSAs, and I noticed as we were moving through the crowd, the throngs of people, tens of thousands, that there were a lot of people that were super emotional, older people that saw the kids coming down the street under the banners of GSAs or QSAs from the schools. I had sort of, Mr. Chair, just, like, an epiphany, a moment of clarity where you can see an insight that you might not have had before. I realized that, you know, so many of these people watching the parade were quite emotional – a lot of people, you can sort of tell if they're feeling tears and feeling emotional – and that they were seeing a new generation of students that were protected by law to be free to join a GSA and a QSA, and that was a protection that was not afforded to those older people in the audience watching these kids come forward.

You know, it's not that long ago when there was overt discrimination and putting people into the closet was the norm and was almost an expectation. Only sometimes by the thin thread of carefully crafted law do we protect people from going back into that regressive situation, going back into the closet, going back into discriminatory practices of employers based on sexuality.

That's why amendment A3 is so important, to reaffirm the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to remind and underline that in this legislation that's before us today. I don't like the legislation that's before us today. I know what happened, right? I mean, I know that it is something that's too clever by half – right? – that this government wanted to move backwards on LGBTQ legislation, on GSAs and QSAs, and they looked for a way by which they could bring it through using some version of the Education Act, that had been sitting on a shelf for years, quite frankly.

I mean, as I said earlier this morning, we took the practical elements of the Education Act and put them into an amendment act a couple of years ago – right? – talking about separate schools' establishment, age of access for kindergarten, trustee code of conduct, and a few other pieces that were good, practical elements of the Education Act that, you know, could be used. I mean, otherwise, Mr. Chair, it's no accident that the Education Act, as it was built, from 2012 sat on the shelf by both the PC government and our former government. It's because it had lots of other problems associated with it.

When you sort of, like I say, take the good bits out of that Education Act and then somehow try to slap a new coat of paint on it and, you know, trot it out as being education reform, I mean, that's simply dishonest, right? We know what happened and where

it was with the Education Act. It sat out rusting in the field for years, and suddenly it's being dragged back here to serve as cover for an attempt to make regressive changes to GSAs and QSAs.

You know, I don't like that, but that being said, I'm a very practical legislator, and I believe that the amendment A3 at least reaffirms some sense of equality and justice to what we are debating here today, and thus I strongly encourage each member here this morning to support amendment A3 as brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I look forward to hearing anyone describe why that shouldn't be so.

Thank you very much for your time, and I appreciate the opportunity to, you know, look for ways by which we can make practical, collaborative deals here on these issues. I believe that that's where the best legislation comes from, when we sort of put our heads together and decide to look for collaboration and look for ways to meet the stated goals of the government and the expectations of the public with progressive legislation.

You know, the word "progressive" doesn't necessarily have to be attached to a particular political party. I don't claim to have exclusive rights or domain over progressive ideas. I mean, good ideas can be used by anybody, quite frankly, and we see that pretty clearly in how we saw other elements of Bill 8 taking pieces from the School Act and from the Education Act. Obviously, people did a lot of work on it. We're talking about this amendment, which is around specific issues around discrimination and so forth, but there are lots of other parts to Bill 8 that are pretty meat-and-potatoes – right? – in terms of building electoral subdivision structures or First Nation service agreements, early childhood services, elections for separate schools, trustee appointments, and so forth. Financial administration to private schools: I mean, that's a very important one, I think. All of these have bubbled up and are some version of maybe what we had before but, obviously, involve some practical thought and consideration.

I'm just suggesting that this amendment that we will bring forward here, that I hope everybody should agree with, is further to that very practical and reasonable side to things as they stand. I certainly welcome, you know, hearing any other views on this issue, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak in this Chamber on matters that are so important, I think. That's the way that we do it right here. You know, it's not like we're looking for ways to take things down.

I guess, you know, my initial reaction as the architect of Bill 24 is that it wasn't easy to get it going. I mean, I knew that by having school boards writing their own safe and caring schools policies, there would be a lot of consternation and a lot of reflection and sometimes difficulty. I know that there were some meetings around the province that got hot in different towns and cities. It was a process by which we literally had hundreds of thousands of Albertans talking about these issues around the kitchen table. It wasn't just like we made some decree from Edmonton and passed it down through the mail and away we go. It was an organic process that created some very, very positive results.

If I could encapsulate my feelings about this now, you know, it's not just words on a page and another law that we passed, but it's moving backwards on literally a movement of understanding and education, not just in our schools but in the whole society. To see anything like that go backwards, I think it's not logical, but I think it also hurts. I think that we all need to consider that with this bill generally and this amendment specifically.

With that, I will take my chair, and I welcome any other comments.

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

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak in favour of this amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It's a very thoughtful amendment and yet another attempt to undo the damage which is being done by this government to the rights of young LGBTQ community members in this province and, in particular, those who are in our schools.

*10:20 a.m.*

Before I get to the amendment, just to sort of review where we are, generally speaking, as members here, I'm sure, are very clear on, we oppose in a very, very definitive and clear and principled way every element, basically, of this bill. The starting point, of course, is that this bill is not about the Education Act, as we have pointed out very clearly. The Education Act, which was drafted by the previous Conservative government in, roughly, about 2012, ultimately included in it a number of difficulties. As a result, when our government was elected in 2015, we did not simply proclaim it because we didn't agree with many elements of it. What we did was that we pulled the pieces out of it which we believed were the best of it, and we amended the School Act on that basis. Then we also subsequently amended the School Act with our Bill 24, which was very much designed specifically to deal effectively with the issues being faced by LGBTQ2S-plus students in our schools across this province.

Then when we had the election, of course, the Premier, or the then Leader of the Opposition, who was running to be Premier, committed to Albertans that he would not, notwithstanding his quite heinous record of attacking members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community over the last 30 years of his political and public career, promised Albertans that he would not legislate on divisive social issues. He did, however, at that time say that what he was going to do was proclaim the Education Act. What we didn't know, though, and what he wasn't honest with Albertans about was that actually he wasn't really going to proclaim the Education Act. He was going to pretend to proclaim the Education Act, but then he was going to amend it to basically ensure that we essentially, with one or two exceptions, maintained the status quo and simply legislated away the protections that our government had put in for the LGBTQ2S-plus community through Bill 24, in effect breaking his promise to Albertans. Essentially, Bill 8 is about legislating on social issues, exactly what that Premier told Albertans he wouldn't do, exactly what he told Albertans they didn't need to worry about.

I remember when we first saw the heinous videos that showed the now Premier talking, bragging about his success at blocking people who were dying from AIDS from seeing their loved ones. You know, it was shocking. But at the time the Premier said: "Oh, my views have changed. Everything has changed. Don't you worry. I may well have done these things in the past, but my views have changed. I understand where Albertans are, and I will not legislate on divisive social issues." Then flash forward to – well, when was this introduced? – sometime in May, I think, so not even two months after the election, and what is he doing? He is legislating on social issues. A broken promise, something that Albertans should think about because that goes to the fundamentals of who a person is.

Anyway, then what does Bill Straight do? Well, it of course removes the obligation for all schools, both public and private, to have safe and caring schools policies in place that specifically speak to the rights of members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community to be protected. They removed that. They have eliminated the ability to enforce the requirement to put these policies in place. They have eliminated the prohibition on outing students who request a GSA. They have eliminated the requirement for principals to give

permission for a GSA immediately upon the request by the student. Of course, they have removed the obligation for private schools to even have GSAs.

Then in the public schools even they have removed the obligation to have a safe and caring schools policy that would protect these kids. Even in the public schools, in certain public schools, we know that the administration, for a variety of reasons, because of relationships with outside bodies, also are opposed to protecting the rights of members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community and are opposed to GSAs. As a result, they may still say: "Oh, yeah. Okay. Well, if someone asks for a GSA, they can have a GSA." But then at the same time they have a series of policies and principles that permeate throughout the school which make it very clear to students that they are not welcome to ask for a GSA.

Then when that is paired, of course, with the decision of the principal to rag the puck, as it were, on the request for the GSA, what has happened is that we then very clearly, systematically, institutionally in a significant number of schools across this province reject the rights and oppress the rights of these LGBTQ2S-plus students. That is what this minister, this Premier, this government is doing. It's a direct attack on the rights of those students.

Now, what this amendment speaks to, though, is another element of that attack. If you are an LGBTQ2S-plus student in the schools and, you know, you've got policies running around the school saying that marriage is a sacrament only between men and women and that our religion rejects homosexuality and you have principals who refuse to answer a child's request for a GSA within, say, eight months, already, of course, you are creating an environment within which that child is very much at risk: at risk of being bullied, at risk of self-harm. I'm not exaggerating. I'm not being hysterical here. I am simply repeating the literature, the research, the lived experiences of people.

So if that's your context, then imagine that you have a teacher to whom many of these students look for safety, for security, for acceptance, who is perhaps a role model to them. That teacher is then fired or that teacher is pushed out because that teacher has somehow done something which the administration or the board does not approve of. In particular, that teacher has lived an out gay or transgendered lifestyle outside of the school, so the board or the principal decides that that teacher is no longer someone that should be employed there.

I want to talk about what the impact of that is on both people here. There's been a lot of talk about the rights of these teachers, the rights of these humans to have fair and equal employment, and that's very important. Of course, people have talked already about the Vriend decision. People have talked about the Trinity Western decision notwithstanding that the Premier's good friend and ally John Carpay, Mr. Pride Flag Equals the Swastika – excellent friends to keep company with, I must say – is fighting very hard against the Trinity Western decision. We know that after many, many years the courts will ultimately reach the conclusion that that kind of discrimination is wrong. We've talked about that, but it still undermines the rights of those people if, as a matter of course, they have to assume that they're going to have to go somewhere between six and 36 months to have their rights protected.

To be quite honest, the process of being fired or demoted or disciplined or pushed out and then having to file a complaint with the human rights code and then potentially having to protect that win at the human rights tribunal in the courts and then potentially having to have it go to another court, that in and of itself is a traumatizing experience. People invariably lose income as a result of that. They also lose employment security as a result of that. They lose financial security as a result of that. They have tremendous

chaos in their lives as a result of that. They may, almost definitely will, 36 months later win the case, but they have suffered, and a lesson has been taught to their colleagues in the staff room who may also be members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community: "Don't do this. You don't want to do this. It's too much work. It's too hard on your life. Don't do this. Just let us quietly discriminate the heck out of you. Just let us discriminate against you, and suck it up." That is what happens if there is no direct mechanism to stop school boards from engaging in this heinous practice.

*10:30 a.m.*

As the former Minister of Education, our whip and the MLA for Edmonton-North West, pointed out, we know that there are examples of this throughout the province. As recently as less than a year ago he was involved in examining these kinds of contracts and hearing from teachers who were experiencing these kinds of discriminatory actions. Sometimes it's overt, and sometimes it's subtle. Let me be clear. I mean, I don't have to have the former Minister of Education walk me through the examples. I can also speak to the direct evidence that I have received from many friends and acquaintances who are teachers in Catholic schools.

I remember speaking to a principal of a Catholic school in Calgary who was in a 25-, 30-year-long loving relationship with his partner, who, by the way, was an exceptionally well-respected business and intellectual leader in the community of Calgary. He talked about how he could not have a picture of himself and his 25-, 30-year partner in his office at the school. He could not have a picture of himself and his husband at school because it would be looked down upon by the board and by the people to whom he answered at the Catholic school board in Calgary. This is just someone who was a random person at a dinner party. You know, I didn't ask to have this conversation. It wasn't sort of the issue at the time. He just told me the story. This is a very, very successful person. That was just the reality that he experienced. He knew what the expectations were.

You know, that's that experience. I've heard that description from long-time friends of mine who have worked in schools. They have just rolled their eyes at the idea that you would ever as a teacher in certain public schools, primarily Catholic schools, be out about being in a loving relationship with a person of the same gender.

I also remember, of course, the case of Jan Buterman. I was elected in 2008. It was only within six to 12 months that Jan came to my office to talk about the fact that he had been dismissed from employment at the St. Albert Catholic school board. This was before Jan had transitioned. I met him with I believe it was his daughter. We talked about what this had done to his life, being fired, that openly telling his students that he was about to embark upon the process of transitioning was a breach of the rules, of what the Catholic school board expected of its employees, and therefore they were going to fire him. They did fire him, and he fought that for years before it was ultimately resolved. I remember meeting with him in the middle of that process, and I can tell you that it took an incredible toll on him. It took an incredible toll on his family. His rights were clearly – clearly – breached as a result of that.

Now, the Minister of Education will say: we don't need this in the Education Act because the law already protects them. What I am describing right now is stuff that is happening right now under the law that the minister thinks is adequate. It's not. It's happening. Just be very clear. It's happening. You know it's happening. The law is not adequate. That's why we are proposing this change. That's exactly why we are proposing this change, to ensure that there are multiple mechanisms through which people can be protected.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

So we've talked a bit about, you know, what happened. We've heard lots about what happened in the Vriend decision and what happened to Mr. Vriend many, many, many years ago and how that made him suffer. We've heard a little bit about Jan Buterman. That happened in about 2009 under the current regime, that the minister claims actually protects people but doesn't. We've heard an example about people who haven't actually filed claims to protect themselves who simply live a discriminated-against life. They live their life with subtle forms of discrimination that they internalize, and they just live, because it's okay under the current regime. We have a very narrow set of mechanisms through which this form of subtle but pervasive discrimination can be challenged, and the Minister of Education wants to keep it that way.

I want to talk as well for a moment not just about what that does to the teachers. That's what I've been doing right now, talking about the implication and the impact on the teachers who are pervasively discriminated against each and every day under the watch and with the apparent endorsement of the Minister of Education. I also want to talk about what it does, again, to the students. As you know, teachers, particularly teachers in high school, have a class of anywhere between 25 and 40 students, and every kid knows their teacher. They might not like their teacher, but they play a critical role in their life, and many kids, of course, very much do like and respect their teachers. That's the way it should be.

They play a critical role in the development not only intellectually and generally academically but also socially and psychologically, the development of kids who are between the ages of 15 and 18. Imagine the profoundly negative, painful consequences to a kid who is struggling with being a member of the LGBTQ2S-plus community watching a teacher who they perceive to be in control, who they perceive to be someone who has played by the rules and is someone that they should respect and listen to and who they perceive to be, in some cases, a lifeline as they go through their own challenges, watching that teacher being systematically discriminated against within the school in which they teach. Every day that that happens, 30 kids learn that it's okay to pervasively discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. We teach it. By modelling it, we teach it.

This is critical. I'm here to talk about the rights of teachers, but I'm also here to talk about the next generation. We cannot model discrimination for kids in our schools, but by allowing the pervasive, systemic discrimination that exists against teachers in certain public and many private schools in this province, that is exactly what we will do. That is why we absolutely must accept this amendment, because what this amendment does is give the Minister of Education extra authority to ensure that that kind of pervasive, systemic discrimination – subtle and overt, both types – against teachers who are members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community can be stopped. It must be stopped because by not stopping it, we teach thousands of kids every day that discrimination is okay, and it's not.

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

Are there any other members wishing to speak to A3?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:40 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

|        |          |         |
|--------|----------|---------|
| Carson | Feehan   | Nielsen |
| Eggen  | Goehring | Notley  |

Against the motion:

|          |               |                 |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Allard   | LaGrange      | Sawhney         |
| Copping  | Loewen        | Schulz          |
| Ellis    | Long          | Shandro         |
| Fir      | McIver        | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Glubish  | Nally         | Toews           |
| Gotfried | Nicolaides    | Turton          |
| Guthrie  | Nixon, Jason  | van Dijken      |
| Hanson   | Nixon, Jeremy | Williams        |
| Hunter   | Pon           | Wilson          |
| Issik    | Reid          | Yaseen          |

|         |         |              |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 6 | Against – 30 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

**The Deputy Chair:** We will move back to Bill 8 proper. Are there any members looking to speak to Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, whether that be questions, comments, or amendments? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I know that you know that I just want to speak on some of the other parts of the education act, Bill 8, because, of course, we've given quite exhaustive consideration to the gay-straight alliance part of this bill. But there are other bits as well. I just wanted to perhaps highlight some of those and provide some constructive criticism. I know that there are different elements of the 2012 Education Act that had been revised or, as I said, that I had included in an amendment act to the School Act a couple of years ago, and then some small changes that the government made here today.

I just wanted to start with the age of access element to this bill. You know, the Education Act was taken off the shelf from 2012. The government here today has chosen to change that part of the age of access quite dramatically from the Education Act.

Just a little bit by way of review. I mean, I know that elements of developing the Education Act were in motion back when I was still teaching even, Mr. Chair. You know, it was a very ambitious project that I believe the minister of the day, Dave Hancock, embarked on with Inspiring Education. It was very ambitious, and it garnered a lot of interest amongst teachers because it tried to look at learning a bit differently. There were some, I think, creative and progressive elements to Inspiring Education. It's funny and it's deeply ironic, too, because some of the bits actually did come through to some degree like, for example, discovery math – right? I never really liked that very much at all. I wasn't a math teacher, but I had kids in school and I knew from when they were in early elementary that they weren't learning math with the expectations that I had. You know, we had to get extra lessons to learn math. The Progressive Conservative government started on a pretty interesting and ambitious journey with Inspiring Ed, and all we ended up with was discovery math, which kind of was a crash and burn thing.

I tried to help to fix some of the elements of mathematics teaching here in the province of Alberta with curriculum – right? – putting a greater emphasis on basic skills in early grades, putting some pretty strict elements of what the learning expectations were at each grade level, reintroducing written portions of the mathematics tests in grade 6 and grade 9, which I think was a good idea as well. I know this current government took that and ran with it in a very distorted way, suggesting that the sky was falling. You know, all it was was a reflection of where kids were in terms of written math in grade 9

in a certain year and at certain time. I knew that it would be a difficult result, but it was part of the way by which we could change some learning so that kids could pick up different skills, including no-calculator portions to the exam. I did the same thing with the grade 6 exam two years before, and the first-year results of a no-calculator, written portion of the exam were challenging at best, right? By golly, the next year the results were good because people changed their teaching and the expectation was there, and the same thing will happen with grade 9 results as well.

Anyway, my point is that, you know, you make changes, and this Education Act was sort of a product of those changes, but you have to make sure that you are analyzing the utility of those changes every step of the way and not just bringing things in for the sake of change. Sometimes it can be damaging – right? – as I said, with some of the elements of the math curriculum.

*10:50 a.m.*

I hope that the government sees fit to look past the political grandstanding that they engaged in, indulged in, during this last election in regard to curriculum. We built an excellent K to 4 curriculum prototype for students, and it's all ready to go and needs to be field tested. By not doing that, we are sitting behind. If this government talks about wanting to engage in education reform, there's a good place to start: an excellent curriculum development program, that has been recognized almost universally as an excellent K to 4 prototype, just sitting there, waiting for this government to start field testing. I encourage them to do so.

Anyway, the age of access element to this bill. It's interesting that they, the government, went back to the School Act, basically, because the 2012 Education Act talked about 21 years of age as a number for students to be able to access education. I know, again, being minister, that this is ambitious and super expensive. I think the government, this present government, recognized that, too. But, I mean, I think I would like to make the point here, Mr. Chair, this morning that it is very important to think of creative ways by which we can be flexible with the access to K to 12 education for our general population because we have challenging completion rates, lower than many other provinces around the country. There are many different reasons for that, but I think one of them is some inflexibility around students being able to access their grade 12 education after the conventional three years of learning that we provide in a high school.

I know that many school boards have built outreach schools, storefront schools, and lots of different options because they recognize the need. But I think it's incumbent upon this provincial Legislature to offer more support and more flexibility around students being able to access and complete their high school diploma after they, maybe, are outside of that window of normal, regular attendance at a high school.

One of the issues or one of the avenues that I was pursuing – and I am happy for people to steal good ideas; here's a good one right now – is to look for ways by which postsecondary institutions can offer diploma equivalency courses at a much more affordable price. Currently, taking any individual class for math 30 or, let's say, English 30 or so forth is, I believe, around \$500 per course. That is a barrier for many students to go back and finish their diploma, that cost. Using existing postsecondary institutions to offer more choice and availability for high school completion I think is really a good idea. I would certainly encourage the Minister of Education to collaborate with the minister of postsecondary education, who is, I know, thinking about this very hard right now, to look for more creative ways by which we can have math 30 or English 30 or bio and so forth in our colleges around the province.

I think it would be a good shot in the arm for postsecondary institutions as well, especially ones in smaller areas or colleges like Portage or Lakeland and so forth to have more space and opportunity for kids to pick up high school equivalency courses. I was kind of actively pursuing that before the last election, and that would be so cool if this government would consider pursuing that. We all know that if someone can complete within five years, then they will carry on and probably go to a postsecondary institution and carry on with their lives. If they don't, then often they will be socioeconomically disadvantaged, and that will be a pattern that will continue for a long time, if not for that individual's entire working life.

Again, another advantage of opening the postsecondary institutions to high school equivalency is that it gets somebody's foot in the door so that they might go to a college like Lakeland or Portage and finish their high school and then say, "Hey, I like it here," and maybe go and take some college courses and sign up and get an advanced degree over time. Yeah. I mean, that is the age of access part of this bill.

**Mr. Ellis:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Chair:** A point of order has been called by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much. With all due respect, I certainly appreciate the comments that are being made by the member opposite. However, I rise under, you know, 23(b)(i), "the question under discussion." I also appreciate, Mr. Chair, that you do give great latitude in these types of discussions, but we're talking about the Education Act itself. I was continuing to hear comments regarding postsecondary, age of access, and really something that is what I would consider to be beyond that of the scope of the Education Act, which affects children, obviously, in elementary, junior high, and high school. I would ask under relevance that the member stay on the bill itself.

Thank you very much.

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

I am prepared to rule. I don't believe that this is a point of order, but I do believe that this is an opportunity to restate to all hon. members of this House that if they would ensure, for the purposes of order and decorum, that debate continues in an effective and efficient manner, that they continue to keep their comments focused on Bill 8, which is currently under consideration. With that said, I consider the matter to be closed.

If the hon. member so chooses to continue, the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Eggen:** Sure. No. That's great. Thank you for those wise words, Mr. Chair. Certainly, it's important for us to stay focused on the issues of the day, which currently is Bill 8.

An important element of Bill 8, just to reiterate then, is the age of access part of this bill, which, again, in this current form that we're debating right now, is younger than 19 as of September 1. Okay? Of course, boards have discretion to be able to allow student access past that, but it costs a lot of money. I remember running the Education Act through back in 2015-2016 as minister. When I met with boards – I think I managed to meet them all, maybe except for one – they always brought up the age of access as being a

problematic element to the Education Act because (a) it costs a lot of money, and then (b) they were concerned about kids older than 18 or 19 or even up to 21 in the same institution as 15-year-old kids or 14-year-old kids.

You know, these were issues that were ongoing. Just by way of perspective, number one, it costs a lot of money; number two, boards have to be ready to accommodate. That's just something to think about. But again, age of access is super important because of the arguments that I just have stated previously.

Another element to Bill 8 is the age of entry. The other end of the school system, Mr. Chair, which, of course, is when kids are entering kindergarten, right? Again, the only change that I can see here, and maybe the minister can help me with my analysis, but it seems like the only change from the School Act is that the age of entry is being enshrined as a regulation rather than being part of the actual bill. I'm not exactly sure why that's the case, that change they made, and perhaps the minister can help me by letting me know why they did that.

**11:00 a.m.**

Another element – I guess I'm just looking for highlights of changes that Bill 8 does have, other than, of course, the GSA element, that we've talked about quite a lot – is in regard to charter schools. You know, the criteria that we use for charter schools I think is something that I reflected a lot on as minister. I certainly appreciated the value of the 14 charter schools, I think, that we have out in the province right now. As minister I did support those schools fully financially as well as, you know, changing some of them. Their charters, I think, needed to be extended, like for Westmount Charter in Calgary. I did extend that one. I did change the scope of the Suzuki Charter School here in Edmonton for them to start offering higher grades. I know I worked a lot with Foundations for the Future in Calgary to help them to get a new facility and so forth. So, certainly, I worked closely with charter schools. I changed some with Aurora school as well. I think I changed their enrolment numbers to allow them to expand.

You know, working with them, I appreciated the work that they did, but it also made me think, Mr. Chair, that there was a good chance to take a pause and for reflection and to remind charter schools of their reason for existence in the first place, which was to provide innovation and to provide innovation that can be integrated through dialogue and active work with public and separate school boards.

Again, the changes that Bill 8 does make around evaluating charter schools and so forth: I would suggest that perhaps in the regulations around establishment criteria and so forth and the evaluation of extending charters, changing their caps, and all that kind of thing, there's specific criteria built into that that restates and reminds the charter schools of their reason for existence in the first place – right? – which is to provide innovation and provide demonstrable interaction and collaboration with school boards in the province. You know, I think that that would be a useful element to this charter school part to Bill 8. That would be something that could be worked into regulation and policy as well.

I see that Bill 8 does include the trustee code of conduct. I think that there was a lot of talk about this when I had my interactions with school boards around the province. The one element of this that I think we all need to take pause on – and, you know, I think it's a critical flaw in this Bill 8, that we're debating today – is the ability to disqualify a trustee from a board. I think it's an incorrect addition to this trustee code. School board trustees are democratically elected members, so I think that this idea of a board having the capacity and the power to kick a trustee off a board

defies the democratic foundation of how trustees are selected in the first place, right?

I know that it would never happen to me, of course, but can you imagine the rest of you deciding to vote an MLA out of the Chamber? This would be, you know, just unthinkable, right? I think that we should use that thought experiment to realize that the recall or the disqualification of a trustee by other trustees is not acceptable. I think we need to look at that critically, and that's what we're here to do, which is great.

I noticed that the establishment of electoral subdivisions is in here. There are a whole number of things that I think needed to get cleaned up around these issues. Of course, the establishment of new Catholic school boards was one that the separate school district establishes, and I did work really hard on this and brought it in as a part of the amendments to the School Act a couple of years ago. You know, we managed to work hard, and I know the minister was part of that work, and I thank her for that very much.

You know, this is something, again, that needed to be cleaned up, for sure, and it's often a source of controversy, so I think that we really did, through those amending negotiations, build something that's better. To see that being moved over into this Bill 8, the Education Act, I'm really happy about that. I'm glad that that is here today.

Transportation is something, again, that I know is an ongoing challenge. Probably as the new minister knows, you get lots of calls and so forth around transportation. The Education Act, as I see it here, this Bill 8 that's being brought forward, talks in a section about how the board and the parent enter into agreements if the parent is transporting the student, and then the minister may direct boards to co-operate around that. I mean, I think that is something that needs to be pursued more strongly. I just started that process of compelling boards to co-operate with each other, and it's kind of in its infancy.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate being recognized here and being able to get up and start talking again on the main bill, Bill 8. It's unfortunate that we weren't able to clarify some language, which is kind of ironic considering that we're talking about the Education Act. You probably want to have language that's as clear and concise as possible, so it was unfortunate that we weren't able to clean some of that up.

The last time we were speaking on the main bill, I remember listening quite intently to a few of the different members – the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre – and listening to some of their comments. I want to just quickly talk about and address some of the comments that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud had mentioned. As I said before, history is a big thing, and when people have participated in that history who were actually there, actually doing the work, seeing what was going on, trying to argue differently tends to be a little futile.

I do remember that back in my days at my old employer, when we would enter bargaining, one of the members that sat with me on that bargaining committee had the history of being in bargaining for the last seven or eight times before that. So it was always interesting listening to the company come and say: "Well, no, no. This is what happened." You know, my colleague would say: "Well, actually, no. That's not the case. This is what happened."

With the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's experience working on the Education Act, we've been able to get some very,

very clear, concise details about what was going on at the time, what was being thought. So when I look at this, the fact that it was first introduced seven years ago, I mean, my gosh, Mr. Chair, again, just referring back to my bargaining days, I couldn't even imagine bargaining a contract for a seven-year length. There's just no way you could see what would be happening seven years into the future. Sure, you can make some, you know, predictions. If you rub that crystal ball hard enough, maybe you might see a few things.

*11:10 a.m.*

So when I look at a bill that is seven years old and the consultations that took place with that being as much as even a decade old, bringing that information three years even further back, I think that for us to just all of a sudden kind of decide to bring in some of that information without checking first is almost a little bit reckless, to be honest.

When I look at some of these things – I know the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud drew my attention around dispute resolution. As we know, most school boards already have dispute resolution in place. So I'm wondering: maybe somebody from the government side might want to get up and speak to this a little bit, clarify things, or maybe the Education minister will want to do this. Is there a need to standardize that process right across the province? I ask that because when I've seen some other bills that we've debated and maybe some suggestions around standardization, there's been a little bit of push-back, saying: "Well, what about the local autonomy? What about the local issues that are going on and their needs and how things are going on in those areas?" And then here we are trying to standardize things, I think, across the province. A little bit confusing there, so I wouldn't mind maybe a chance for somebody to explain what the purpose is, why the need for the standardization. I mean, I don't necessarily have a problem with it, but if it's going to create problems for these local school boards, I think we need to know how they're going to be able to manage those things.

The other thing that I know the member drew my attention to was around the voting of trustees and how, you know, one minute you could be voting for a Catholic trustee, and then maybe the next year you're voting for a public trustee. My gosh, talk about confusion. Quite honestly, it almost even sounds a little bit like some red tape. From the sense that I get from that, it's almost equivalent to us here in Alberta maybe voting for another MLA outside of the province, which is, I think, ridiculous. I think this is potentially trying to open up maybe a can of worms that I don't think we necessarily should be opening. You know, if you're participating in the public system, you vote for the public trustee. If you're participating in the Catholic system, you vote for the Catholic trustee and so forth. I think that mixing it up is going to create a lot of problems. We have seen some other legislation potentially starting to intermix things. I don't know if that's an intent or maybe again just not quite seeing what the problems were.

That brings me now to some of the comments that I heard the last time we were on the main bill here, with the Member for Edmonton-City Centre speaking to that local reverend in his local community about the impacts that were going on around GSAs and about what we need to do as legislators and maybe as a society as a whole and how we need to be more inclusive, need to be more understanding, need to be more accepting in our positions.

It got me thinking about a story that I heard from one of my local pastors in Edmonton-Decore. You would love this guy, Mr. Chair. He's quite the character. He has had some very, very real-world experiences with somebody that was close to him in his younger days that he ended up finding out was gay. I mean, the impacts of that – the story, quite frankly, brought tears to my eyes. He was

initially telling it in sort of a third person, and it was about three-quarters of the way through that we started to understand that he was the other participant in there.

I just can't help but start to think about, you know: "How many stories do we need to hear? How many instances do we need to hear about? How many protests do we need to see out front before we start to question whether we're heading down the right direction?" I find myself struggling with it. Are we heading down this route because we have some small group that we're owing to, donors that we're owing to? I can't shake that feeling, Mr. Chair, that we're doing this simply to pander to that group at the expense, literally, of a minority group of individuals who the only thing they're guilty of is loving who they want to love. I think it's incredibly sad if that is indeed the direction that we're going.

Maybe once this session has ended and we all get a chance to get back to our constituencies, we need to take a really, really hard look deep down inside of each one of us and make sure that we're here for the right reasons, that we're here to serve all Albertans. I'll be the first one to say, Mr. Chair, that I don't always agree with some of my constituents, and I'm sure that they don't always agree with me, but we are able to have that conversation in a respectful way. At the end of the day, I think we can all agree that nobody wants to put somebody at risk.

We've already seen multiple, multiple examples: you know, the Leader of the Official Opposition telling the story earlier that wasn't even solicited. I think every single member of the opposition has risen in this House showing statistics, showing stories, showing e-mails, their own personal experiences before being elected officials here. Again I just have to ask: how much more evidence do we need before we finally take a step back, pause, and rethink, maybe, what we're doing? Again, I just always have to ask: how many is it going to take? Hoping that schools are expected to follow the policy sounds like a whole lot of dice-rolling. We're hoping that every single school in this province will follow the rules. I mean, you know, I would love to see that.

I remember I think it was a *W5* news story or something. They had set up a fridge with a defect on purpose, and they'd brought in repairmen to look at that fridge to see if they would be honest, up front. Some were, and that's fantastic. Unfortunately, there is always one or two – they came in and tried to oversell them and tried to fix things that weren't broken. I look at this with the hope that all schools will follow the rules. I think we would be safer to make sure that they follow the rules, which would mean not changing what we currently have in terms of the language around GSAs, which is contained in Bill 24. As I've always said, Mr. Chair, language is everything. You change one little word; you change the whole sentence.

One minute I'm hearing: you know, we'll have the strongest protections in the country. Then it was: well, we're among the strongest. Instead of being mediocre or average, why don't we just be the best? That is what we have right now. We have the best language. There's no need to change it unless – again, I can't shake that feeling that we're pandering to a small group that maybe we're beholden to. Maybe they were donors. I don't know. I wish I could shake this feeling, but I just can't.

*11:20 a.m.*

I've also heard some rationale: well, you know, if by some chance, then the privacy laws will protect. The problem is that it's after the fact. It's after the damage is done. It's after the youth has been outed before they're ready. I've just seen too many things and heard too many stories for us to take that risk and jeopardize those youth, whether it be to get kicked out, ostracized, bullied, whatever the case.

If we're really true to what we're trying to stand for in here, where every child matters, every single one, we cannot take the risk by just hoping that the safety net of privacy laws to protect students will catch them. Then to expect them to have to go through a lengthy procedure in terms of legal considerations and everything like that: now we're just exacerbating the problem because they didn't want to be outed or come out yet at that moment in time, and now we're starting to make an even bigger deal of it. It's just the wrong direction to go with this.

So my hope is that the government members will take a step back here and say to themselves: are we indeed putting somebody at risk? And if you get to that point, then you come to the conclusion of: we just can't take that risk. Then again, I'll start asking the question: if we're ready to go down that road, if we're ready to take that risk, how many will be too many? Will it be one student? Will it be 10 students? Will it be one teacher? Will it be 10 teachers? At what point do we decide: "Okay. This has gone too far. It's gotten out of hand. We have to stop it"? What is an acceptable price to pay? I think that on this side of the House we've been very, very clear that the acceptable price to pay is zero, none, no students, no teachers.

You know, when I visited my GSAs, the things that we discussed during my visit there, as I said, Mr. Chair, surprised me. I was not expecting that. I was expecting maybe some discussions around hardships that the students were having, maybe some concerns that they were having at home, or maybe even discussions that they were contemplating informing people around their sexual orientation. What I found was that we talked about what was appropriate to put on pizza. We talked about what was appropriate music to be listening to. Apparently, I'm out of step. I know I love my '80s music, but some of the youth there thought that that was just a little bit too far back and that I should probably update my playlist a little bit. We talked about who their favourite teachers were, what their favourite class was, and even about some of the projects that they were working on in some of those classes. This narrative that has been put out into the public about them being some kind of crazy, driven sex club or something like that: nothing could be more wrong than that.

We've seen our students protest around why these GSAs are so important. Do you know what I also noticed, Mr. Chair? It wasn't just some of the students that belonged to the GSA; it was also some of their friends that support them. Now, not only do we have students partaking in these GSAs to find a safe place where they can just be themselves, but they do have a lot of friends that support them greatly, and even they were out on the street. I was, you know, absolutely in awe finding out, when I went to one of my school graduations, that a few students at the grade 6 level also went out and protested. I mean, at grade 6 they know how important these things are and how they need to support their classmates so that they feel included, so they feel safe, so they feel like they're part of the group.

Again, how long do we go on ignoring this? I mean, I think that to us on this side of the House it's so blatantly obvious. I guess that sometimes I wish – you know, 21st century – that I could just maybe plug somebody's brain into the back of mine, and after a few seconds they'd be able to go: oh, I get it; oh, that's why. We have to take a step back on this around our GSAs because we are simply heading down a road where, if we don't change direction now, we are going to create harm. And then it's after the fact; the harm is done at that point. I'm personally not willing to take that risk. I doubt that any of my colleagues here on this side of the House are willing to take that risk. Zero. I've mentioned before that the Education minister very proudly wore that pin, so we need to take that to heart. I think our walk needs to look like our talk. We simply can't put one at risk.

History has told us – again, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud very eloquently talked about how we got to this point. I think we have outdated language. Like the Member for Edmonton-North West and . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

Are there any members looking to speak to Bill 8? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to the main bill, Bill Hate, and I would just like to give an affirmation to my colleague and Member for Edmonton-Decore: you are loved and accepted despite your '80s playlist. Having those conversations in the GSAs is wonderful, talking about what the kids enjoy, what they're listening to. I can relate to you, hon. member, in the sense that my playlist has a lot of '80s music. There are a lot of great conversations that come from talking about music. When you're . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Through the chair, I wouldn't mind, hon. member.

**Ms Goehring:** I apologize, Mr. Chair.

Yeah, I think that talking about some other conversations that happen in a GSA is great. I wonder how many members across the floor here have actually sat in the GSAs in their communities and talked with the kids and learned about what's going on in the GSAs. Something as fun as debating music and talking about playlists, as innocent as that, occurs. I would encourage all members across the House to sit down with these groups in their GSAs and chat with the kids about why it's so important and what some of the fun things are that they're doing as kids.

Most of my career I spent working with youth. You know, they challenge our beliefs and our values as adults and can provide a lot of insight into kind of a world view that's maybe a little bit more progressive than what we had when we were youths. It's very refreshing to hear from youth about what matters to them and why it's important. As a grown-up, as a legislator in this very Chamber, to be able to have those experiences is something that I'm very, very grateful for. It means a lot to me when I can sit down with people and talk about their stories and hear the impacts that their support people in their life have on them and hearing about what's working for them as youth and what's not working.

Regarding Bill 8, the general bill, there's been a lot of discussion around the GSAs, but like the Member for Edmonton-North West reminded us this morning, there's more in this piece of legislation that's being brought forward that causes concern, Mr. Chair.

**11:30 a.m.**

One of those concerns is the trustee code of conduct and recall. It outlines that the trustee code of conduct would provide definitions of breaches and provide for sanctions, including the ability to disqualify a trustee from the board. That's concerning, Mr. Chair. As an elected official I believe that the electors should be able to make that decision when they are no longer supporting that person that they had elected. It concerns me that a trustee could come out against the general group of other trustees and be fired for having an opinion that's different from everybody. That creates an environment where you are simply agreeing because you're fearful of the position that you were elected to do. At any point, as an elected official, if I'm fearful of consequence, I'm not able to speak freely.

That's exactly what this Chamber represents. We should have the ability to stand up and speak what we believe and what has been shared with us through our constituents. I stand in this Chamber expressing concerns, asking questions from people that I represent

in Edmonton-Castle Downs and across the province as the Official Opposition liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces as well as the culture critic. I should be able to ask questions of government and not have the same opinion. That's one thing that makes democracy incredible, that there are various opinions and various forms of expressing those. Having the ability to be fired by the trustees, the board, is concerning as an elected official. I think that this is something that could have more discussion going forward.

Another piece of this legislation that is a little bit concerning is no boards for private schools. Not having a board to review spending, best practices, review decisions or disputes between parents and staff is confusing to me. I know that as a parent I would like an opportunity to be able to solve any sort of dispute in an objective, well-detailed manner. By taking that away from a parent, I think it creates some level of conflict and some uncertainty in parents' rights and what their ability to express concerns is.

While I am personally appreciative of the great relationship that I have with the trustees in Edmonton-Castle Downs, I know that it's because of that relationship that things get resolved. There is a voice for parents at the table when there's a concern within the school. Through my office parents can come to me, and I immediately reach out to the school trustee to help build that relationship so that they have a voice within the school their child attends. I think that removing that is a concern. Fortunately, when you have that third party involved, it can be successful. It's someone who's impartial, someone who is not on the side of the school or not on the side of the parents. They're someone that can come in and help facilitate a conversation and often successfully resolve it in a positive way.

I'm curious how families under this piece of legislation would find support to mediate their children's education or access to supports. I know that early in my career I worked with the city of Edmonton under a pilot project with the mediation program in the school board. I was able to work with students and with parents as well as school administration to help mediate conflict within the school. While I wasn't a trustee, there was a specific project that had taken place to help facilitate that communication. It's essential that if there's a dispute, you have a way to get it resolved.

As a mediator my job was to be impartial and to listen to all sides and have those involved come up with a solution that worked for everybody. It's successful when you have people come to the table, but when you take away that opportunity, I'm concerned what's going to happen, Mr. Chair. I know that it could result in some parents and children feeling unheard, not feeling supported. Not having that extra avenue of support is concerning. They might not feel that they have a voice. They might not have a way – well, they won't have a way to resolve conflict if there's a conflict between a parent and the administration of the school. There isn't that impartial person that is there for them to be their voice.

I've talked a little bit about another concern, Mr. Chair, under this bill. It talks about the removal of the director under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, taking out the term "director" and changing it to "child intervention worker." We know that CYFEA has the director clearly defined under that act, under what it means. To remove that from this act and replace it with a term that isn't even in CYFEA: it is unclear what the intention of doing that is. I know, as someone who came from child intervention and worked under that, I had a lot of different responsibilities, if you will. The director of Children's Services, then, would give us delegation, depending on our role, and they would decide what our responsibilities were. Removing the term "director" and putting in a term that doesn't even exist is not providing any clarity. It's confusing what the intention of doing this is. The question is whether it's going to be putting more work on the front line.

I know as a front-line worker that there's a lot that's expected of workers in Children's Services. They carry a lot of responsibility, and to add more onto them without a clear, supported piece of legislation is confusing. It seems to be that it could be perhaps increasing red tape. When we're looking at this legislation and what the intention is, it could also be perhaps as a consequence, without intention, downloading more responsibility onto workers. That's a bit concerning. When I was involved with the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, we heard loud and clear from front-line workers that they have a lot of responsibilities on their plate. Looking at caseload pressures was something that needed to happen. When a decision like this is being made, to change what might seem simple wording, there is an unintended consequence of that. I'm just concerned that perhaps that wasn't the intention, but that's what might happen if that change occurs.

Talking a little bit more about Bill 8 and the GSAs, I mean, I can't say it enough how concerning it is that this introduced legislation is going to roll back the clock on protections for our GSAs and our young people. It's very concerning, Mr. Chair. We can't as government ignore the pleas from our teachers, from our students about what this piece of legislation is going to do. We've been asked to just leave it alone. When we formed government and did Bill 24, we were able to look at the current legislation under what Bill 10 was and realized that it was a shell of legislation and that we needed to actually enhance it and create actual safety for our GSAs and students that were accessing them and not putting lives at risk. There is a fear in Albertans that this is exactly what this does.

As the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs I can say that I have not had anyone reach out to me to say that they support destroying GSAs. It hasn't happened. I can say that myself and my staff have outwardly shown support of GSAs by wearing a simple pin, Mr. Chair, that members of the public have stopped us to chat about the importance of fighting for our GSAs, people that don't know why we're wearing the pin. They just see these buttons that say, "Support GSAs," "Save GSAs" and are inspired to come up to you and approach you and express concern about the status of the GSAs here in the province.

*11:40 a.m.*

It's heartwarming to know that so many people are paying attention and are watching what this government is doing, and it's heartbreaking that they're still going ahead and ignoring the pleas of so many Albertans to stop with this hurtful legislation, this legislation that we know, as we've heard over and over again, puts lives at risk by not allowing GSAs to be formed in a timely fashion, policies that don't essentially allow the word "gay" to be part of the title. It's very, very concerning.

Mr. Chair, I've talked about my engagement with my great GSA in Edmonton-Castle Downs. I had brought in the former Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Estefania Cortes-Vargas, to come and share their story with the youth that attended the GSA. They were able to share their resiliency growing up and what their role as an MLA was, and it was inspiring to witness young people looking at someone from their community talking about their experience in the role as an MLA and being able to see that, you know, that is something that they could have as a future aspiration, right? Seeing yourself reflected in government is important. And I can say that members on this side of the House are here advocating for and supporting and listening to our young people and what matters to them.

Again, I would ask the members opposite if they've had the opportunity to go and engage with GSAs in their community and listen first-hand to the experiences of these young people and how

it's had an impact on them. Perhaps some have; some have not. I just worry that they're not listening to the entire story.

I had a constituent and a very dear friend of mine reach out, and they had indicated that I could share their story. They've said that they've talked a lot about GSAs and being gay publicly before, and they want to share it again for kids in a similar situation to see. He says:

I knew I was gay from a very young age, and for a lot of my childhood it was a very scary feeling. No one around me was like me, and I didn't know how to express that I was different. Without anyone else being gay that I knew, I came to the conclusion, at 12 years old, that I was not normal. That I had done something wrong or was having inappropriate feelings that I should be ashamed of.

I would wait until everyone else in my family was out of the house as a kid, turn on the TV and watch Will and Grace, making sure to sit close to the television so I could lunge [to change the channel] if someone came home, like it was wrong for me to watch it. I loved that show because they were people like me and that's how I learned what being gay was like. Because you didn't learn about it in school. Because when I put my anonymous question about gay relationships into the bucket in sex ed class to be answered, the teacher pulled it out, said it was an inappropriate question, and threw it away without addressing it.

When I was younger, I would deliberately burn and freeze myself in the shower as punishment for having "gay thoughts". I didn't know what else to do because I didn't have anywhere to go to express these feelings. It's easy to say I could have talked to a parent or therapist about it, but when you are a scared child who thinks he's not feeling the way he's supposed to and that he's done something wrong, you can't. You can't face that humiliation and you don't want your parents to be disappointed in you.

My high school gay-straight alliance is what saved my life. Mr. Chair, I think that bears repeating. "My high school gay-straight alliance is what saved my life."

Being gay is something you can hide, so it is almost impossible to seek out other gay people to talk to about the hurt and the pain that we feel as youth, thinking we're not normal or worthy of love. Having a GSA made it possible to connect with other kids questioning their identities, and it was one of the first times I felt known and accepted in my life. I didn't feel like it was a dark secret or a shameful thing I had to hide and feel bad about.

I came out to my classmates in September of Grade 10, but I wasn't ready to talk to my family about it yet. Not because I thought they were bad people, but because I didn't want to let them down. Having a space to go without my mom being told about it was the point of going. Can you imagine if I went to a GSA to figure out how to best come out to my mom, and the school told her first? Without me knowing they did? Your mom only gets that moment of honesty and truth once, and you deprived the child from being able to do it themselves? My mom is one of my best friends now, and one of the most supportive allies I have, but I needed the GSA to be able to come out to her in a way that was best for our relationship. She promised not to tell my dad when I told her, and she kept that promise. A relationship between spouses is one of the most powerful and enduring things on the planet, and even then my mom agreed that some secrets need to be kept, for a period of time. Why can't a school recognize that, and keep that secret for the health of a child being able to come out in their own way?

I can't imagine not having had a space like a GSA in my high school growing up. It's harder still to imagine being that student that has the courage to ask for one . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you, hon. member. I would remind you to table the document that you were quoting from at the appropriate time.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday rising to speak.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to once again rise to speak to Bill 8. Of course, this is a very important piece of legislation in the protections that it is going to strip away from the LGBTQ community, not only the students that go to school in the classrooms across our province but also the teachers who teach in those classrooms and are there to supervise these students and should be protected as well.

I think that it is important to take a moment to look at how we got here. Of course, the Premier was elected leader of the Progressive Conservative Party in March 2017. Eleven days later he told the *Calgary Herald* editorial board that he believes that parents should be notified if their child joins a GSA. His direct quote from that interview: "I don't think it's right to keep secrets from parents about challenges . . . kids are going through." Eleven days on the job and rolling back GSA protections was firmly in the sights of this Premier and his caucus, or is firmly in the sights, I suppose.

It wasn't just teachers, kids, and the LGBTQ community who had an issue with the now Premier's comments. The now Justice minister at the time had some concerns. He even sent an e-mail to the members of his party entitled Why I Couldn't March in Pride. Mr. Chair, do you know the reason the now Justice minister gave for why he couldn't march in pride? Quoting him directly here: the Premier has come back from Ottawa and brought with him a long track record of voting against the LGBTQ community. Interesting how times have changed.

Now, the now Justice minister also expressed his dismay that the Premier wasn't meeting with the LGBTQ community to discuss their concerns. Quoting what he said, "We don't need another lake of fire, period," is how the now Justice minister closed the e-mail. Now, pay attention to that phrase, Mr. Chair. You'll hear it again very soon.

*11:50 a.m.*

Of course, the now Premier won the UCP leadership, and although we could and should have a long conversation about how he won and the lingering results of that and the investigations to come, that can wait for another day. But he won that leadership and then declared that Bill 24, a bill put forward by our government, a bill about protections for GSAs, wasn't actually about protecting GSAs. It was about him. Sounds a little crazy. I think you might agree, Mr. Chair, but that's what this Premier said at the time. He told the media that Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, was about attacking him personally. He instructed his caucus to vote against the bill, and they did. At every opportunity every single UCP MLA stood up and voted against an act to protect GSAs, I believe except for the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who abstained from the vote and made that public record through the media if I'm correct. If not, the member can correct me, and I apologize.

Of course, the now Premier held a conference, and at the policy conference a policy came forward to require notification of a student's enrolment in extracurricular clubs.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. Just for my own clarity, are you currently reading from a document that was e-mailed to you or something?

**Mr. Carson:** No. No, Mr. Chair. This is something that I put together myself. It's not correspondence. Yeah. Thank you very much.

At the policy conference a policy came forward to require notification of a student's enrolment in extracurricular clubs. I'm hoping that you might be able to guess what extracurricular clubs they were referring to. The now Minister of Transportation figured it out quite quickly, as has been stated in this House. He stood up and told the room loudly, quote: this is about outing gay kids. He got booed by a room full of his members, but that is exactly what the member said. Now, I wonder where that same concern and compassion for the LGBTQ kids across our province is today. Once again the member was quoted saying: don't be called the lake of fire party. I'm begging you: is what he said next. He wasn't alone in that belief that this policy was going to result in a lake of fire within the party.

The now culture minister shared those same worries, stating, "Please vote against this resolution," pleading with the delegates. Both ministers failed in their attempts to persuade the party who overwhelmingly passed the resolution.

Of course, it wasn't just the now Transportation minister and the now culture minister. The now Justice minister came back to raise concerns again, tweeting that he was going to move the needle and repeal that policy that the members of his party supported. Well, that policy continues to be on their website, which should tell you how effective that member, the now Justice minister, is at moving the needle within his own party when it comes to protecting the LGBTQ community. [interjections]

I continue to get heckles from members beside me here. Hopefully, they might decide to speak to the legislation themselves instead of interrupting my opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents. Thank you very much.

The UCP once again proudly keeps that piece of policy on their website. So they continue to support the outing of the LGBTQ community. Now the UCP has a policy that their now Transportation minister told Albertans is about outing gay kids, that the now Justice minister said needs to be repealed, and that the now culture minister thinks shouldn't be passed, and I really wonder how each of them will vote on this piece of legislation because Albertans are watching, just as they stood to oppose policy like this in front of their members months ago.

All of that brings us to where we find ourselves today, debating a bill that will go backwards on protecting GSAs and the kids and staff who rely on them. Mr. Chair, honestly, I'm begging you that we do not turn back the clock.

Now, once again I think that we could reflect even further on how we came here today besides the backwards policies of this UCP government and their members. Unfortunately, Alberta was a bit late to the game when it comes to recognizing the rights of the LGBTQ community. In 1998, of course, the Supreme Court provided a landmark ruling in *Vriend versus Alberta*. Delwin Vriend was fired from his teaching position for his sexual orientation, and he was not able to contest that decision because he was not protected under Alberta law. Same-sex marriage was not legally recognized in this province until 2005. We were one of the last jurisdictions in Canada to grant this recognition to Albertans. In 2008 a Catholic school division fired a teacher for being trans.

That's a sad chapter in our history and one I thought we had closed, but then came Bill 10. It wasn't Bill 10 at first, of course. First it was a motion calling on the government to protect GSAs in law. The motion was voted down by the PCs and the Wildrose at the time. As members of this House know, motions are not binding. They are simply expressions of the will of this House, and in 2014 this House would not affirm that students deserve legal protections. Very unfortunate, Mr. Chair.

So MLAs who believed that LGBTQ youth rights matter tried again. Bill 202 was introduced in November 2014. It was modelled

off some of the strongest protections and statutes in Canada that existed at the time, and it would have, one, made it mandatory for schools to establish GSAs where students request them. It enshrined references to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act and protected the name gay-straight alliance in law, something that this government is not willing to do, but the government wouldn't even do that.

Over a weekend in December 2014 the Prentice government hastily drafted Bill 10. Bill 10 did not protect the formation of GSAs. Instead, should a student be refused the right to form a GSA, they would have to seek a judicial review of the board's decision, and the bill gave staff the explicit right to refuse to support the establishment of a GSA subject to appeal to the board and subsequent judicial review. Of course, as is the history, Albertans did not stand for that outrageous suggestion, that students should have to sue their school boards for the right to be safe at school. Albertans stood out in the cold in December, right in front of this very House, to make sure the government of the day listened and stood up for the LGBTQ youth of our province, and an amended Bill 10 was passed that spring.

Of course, early in our government's term cases came to light that highlighted loopholes in Bill 10 in the practise of that legislation. We heard the story of Jane MacNeil, a student who wanted a GSA in Calgary and faced delay after delay. A mother of a seven-year-old girl had to file a human rights complaint to have her trans daughter's rights recognized at school. Now, what we were asking youth to go through to simply form a club where they would feel safe and accepted at school was nothing short of heroic on those students' parts.

Then in March 2017 the now Premier told the *Calgary Herald* editorial board that he believed children should be outed if they join a GSA. Now, there's nothing balanced about that, Mr. Chair. So our government introduced a bill that would close the loopholes of Bill 10. Of course, that led to Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, which we've had the opportunity to discuss at length as to why that piece of legislation goes far and beyond in terms of strengthening and protecting the LGBTQ community and the students in our schools.

You know, once again, it's very unfortunate that this government is, one, not willing to stand up and speak what they believe. If they believe that weakening the legislation that's already in place in Alberta is the right thing to do, then stand up – stand up – for your convictions. Unfortunately, it seems that the government or members of the government don't have the courage to stand up and say: I have stakeholders who want to weaken this legislation, so I'm going to support it. Unfortunately, they're only speaking half of the story, so I'm here to have that conversation about the other half. Well, I suppose they're speaking half the story, except they're actually not speaking at all. So that's a whole other matter.

There are many other concerns with this legislation, some of which I laid out in my speech there, but we continue to hear from school boards and from the ATA and other representatives of educators across this province that this legislation has been moved forward too quickly. There has not been any real consultation on it. A majority of the changes that are actually being made in this legislation are going to be forced through regulation, which is very concerning.

You know, I heard this government at length when they were in opposition complaining every time our government brought forward pieces of legislation that required enforcement or changes through regulation. Now here we are, and they're going to move forward with a piece of legislation that heavily relies on discussions through regulations, which they have said would be moving forward in September, I believe. Unfortunately, that's too little too

late for these school boards that are going to have to grapple with the decisions that they make through regulations at the last minute.

*12:00 p.m.*

Of course, rules requiring detailed policies to support GSAs have been weakened through this legislation. Once again, a big concern of mine is that this minister, the Education minister, has not spoken about the fact that she stood up in this House and said that all students will be protected, yet she's left loopholes through regulations where they could actually exempt certain schools – charter schools, private schools – from having to follow the legislation, as weak as it is, at all in the first place. So that's very concerning.

Of course, the policy before us, the legislation before us does not, like Bill 24 had laid out, give the opportunity for students to use explicitly the words “gay” or “queer” in their associations. We see some schools decide to go with rainbow club or whatever it might be, which is fine if that's what the students want. But if the students come to their principal or to their school authority and say, “We want to call it a gay-straight alliance or a queer-straight alliance, to name it what it actually is,” well, there are no assurances. Through the loopholes in this legislation a principal might say, “Sorry, you can't call it a gay-straight alliance because that, you know, offends me” or whatever might be the case. That's very concerning.

Now, once again, the government has committed to presenting new regulations prior to September 1. I hope those come sooner than later because – you know, as far as we can tell, I imagine this will pass; of course, I can't see into the future – it's very concerning that when we talk about transportation issues and enrolment issues, we're going to have to wait for that to come through regulations. When we look at common age of entry, school transportation, school fees, which are very important to parents and guardians of students: well, we're going to wait till the last minute to let you know about school fees. That's very concerning, Mr. Chair.

Now, there are really too many issues within this legislation to even go over. I think that we really haven't had enough time to discuss this legislation, so I hope that we have ample time here to continue this discussion about the flaws and the loopholes that have been put forward by this Education minister. I'm just completely concerned about the lack of any certainty that has been put forward in this legislation, and I think it really goes to show that this government, you know, a group of people who called themselves a government in waiting for so many years, when it was their time to shine, didn't show up with any details. We saw this over the last four years. They couldn't prepare shadow budgets. Once again here we are, with a complete lack of details from this caucus, because when they should have been working, they were busy meeting with special-interest groups, I suppose.

Mr. Chair, I hope that we continue to have this important discussion. I really urge all members to not support this piece of legislation because it is completely lacking in important details for students, for teachers, for parents, and for anyone affected by the education system across our province. Once again, I hope that the members do not support it because it is doing a disservice to our education system and the people that are encompassed by it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Are there any other members looking to speak to Bill 8? I see the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and Member for Edmonton-Strathcona rising to speak.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you. Let me just thank the chair for his measured and nuanced cadence. It's very calming to all of us, I must say. I'll try to maintain the same spirit of conversation.

I'd like to take this opportunity, as we discuss Bill 8 in committee, to speak as well a little bit about other elements of this bill. I mean, I will of course finish, I suppose, to some degree on, again, the critical elements that have us here today, which are the removal of the protections for the LGBTQ2S-plus community that our government put in through Bill 24, but I also want to talk just a little bit about some of the other elements that are coming in through Bill 8.

I will grant you that on this, you know, there's no question that the intention to import the original Education Act was articulated by this UCP government in the election, so some of the elements that are in here are exactly things that they did discuss in the election. It's not exactly a point that we're going to be here forever on because, as many people have rightly pointed out, you indicated that you would do this in the election, so it makes sense that you would. We'll take this opportunity to point out why maybe it's not the most advisable thing, but if at the end of the day you still want to go ahead with it, have at 'er.

With that being the case, there are a couple of elements that we don't think are particularly wise that are being incorporated from the original Education Act, that are surviving the original Education Act through what is now Bill 8.

Of course, I need to back up a little bit and once again reinforce the very substantive points that our Member for Edmonton-Whitemud made – I think it was last week – where she pointed out how much of the original Education Act did not survive this government's introduction as per their promises in the last election and that the vast majority of what we're seeing in Bill 8 really is very much dedicated to rolling back the protections that our government introduced for the LGBTQ2S-plus community through Bill 24, and that is, of course, without question, the primary objective. But there are a couple of remnants, fragments, shall we say, from the old Education Act that did actually make it through into Bill 8 that I think that the members opposite should at least consider reconsidering.

One of them, of course, is this question of the matter of a trustee code of conduct. Now, all of us agree that there should be a code of conduct for school trustees – I think that's only reasonable – but in the original Education Act and now through Bill 8 there is a provision that would see trustees themselves be able to come together to sanction and indeed remove trustees from the board.

Now, we've already articulated, of course, that this is undemocratic because trustees are there by virtue of their elections, and certainly we would never ever see in this House a situation where members of this House could actually force someone to resign their seat. Parties can certainly force people to leave their caucus, but you can't force people to resign their seat. You know, public pressure can do that, but there's no law that allows it. That would be profoundly undemocratic and unparliamentary, and it would subvert the ultimate authority of voters. The same exists with respect to school trustees, who are also elected, yet this act allows for boards of trustees to remove individual trustees.

That was something that came up in the original consultation around the Education Act when it was done in 2012, and as we have stated many times here, there are many elements to that original act which ought to be reconsidered because, quite frankly, it was developed seven years ago. Things have changed, so it makes sense to consider what has changed, what new things have happened. Is what was developed seven, eight, nine years ago still the best thing? What I would argue is that we have had some incidents that have

occurred which would mean that the answer to that question is in the negative.

I give as an example the reality TV show that the people of Edmonton were compelled to watch with respect to the Edmonton Catholic school board a couple of years ago. It was quite something, I have to say. That was a board that came perilously close to having to be put into trusteeship because of the profound breakdown in relationships between the trustees. Honest to goodness, if those trustees at that time had had the ability to fire each other, it would have looked like an extended version of a *Survivor* episode, except there would have been nobody left on the island very, very quickly, and there would have been nobody running the Catholic school board. When I look back at how that school board was functioning, if I think about any of those folks having the ability to, on a majority basis, actually fire each other, good Lord, it just would have been a debacle.

**12:10 p.m.**

Let us remember that the Catholic school board of Edmonton, the Edmonton Catholic school board – of course, thankfully, these are not things that are going on anymore. They're doing a much better job. They pull together. They're refocused on providing a good, strong education to their students here in Edmonton. They're, I think, all doing the job that they've been elected to do, and that's good news for the students, for the families that those students are part of, for taxpayers, who put so much money into our system of education, for the people of Edmonton, and, of course, for the trustees and the people who work for the board.

So that's all good news, but there was a time where it was looking pretty dicey. I don't know. Maybe the former Minister of Education can tell me roughly what the budget of the Edmonton Catholic school board was at a certain point. I imagine it would have been awfully large.

**Mr. Eggen:** About \$600 million, \$700 million.

**Ms Notley:** About \$600 million, \$700 million.

If you imagine the kind of dysfunction that existed with the Edmonton Catholic school division a couple of years ago – there they are, responsible for managing maybe \$700 million of hard-earned Alberta taxpayer money. We then throw into that mix the ability for them to fire each other randomly, depending on who's talking to whom that morning and who's managed to cobble together a majority that particular day. It's just a complete recipe for disaster, and it's a recipe for disaster which implicates tens of thousands of kids and hundreds of millions of dollars.

The way you avoid that, then, is that you don't create more problems than you need to. I would argue that this provision, which now gives trustees the ability to take a run at each other and their position on the board, is actually going to create more problems than they could ever solve, and in so doing, it's going to put at risk the quality of education received by the kids who are educated in whatever board it is. I'm not saying – and it could be any board. It could be any board. I'm just thinking of the example that the people of Edmonton observed a couple of years ago or three years ago, I guess, now.

So I just don't think it's wise. It strikes me as an unwise provision. Now, by all means, carry on if you're going to do it, but I urge you to think about that example and think about how frustrated you will be with yourselves when you conclude that you've just given these boards the ability to further fight with each other in a way that has very high stakes. When you in government over there are trying to manage these issues, you will discover that you've actually created a problem that didn't exist before, and you

did that at the same time as undermining the value of the votes that were cast by the people of this province in the course of trustee elections. So I'm not sure where the win is here. I just, honestly, do not see the win. Anyways, that is one of the concerns.

Now, of course, one of the other concerns which you will have heard from us is, again, the encouragement to increase the number of charter schools that exist in both the original Education Act and now in Bill 8. You know, the original idea around charter schools was that they would be very, very rare and unique and be providing a very rare and unique form of education that just could not, for any practical reasons, be provided through the public school boards that already existed. We soon discovered that that's actually not a description that is easily corralled, so what happens very quickly is that you can have a proliferation of these schools. But what we've seen with charter schools, of course, is that once they're established, they then, quite rightly, start asking for more resources for this or for that. Suddenly what happens is that you're either having to respond to those requests for resources, or the priority of the resource requests are out of line with the other priorities, and it essentially results in a very decentralized, which is not necessarily bad, sort of very chaotic process for deciding where funds and resources go with respect to the distribution of education dollars.

You know, I've heard members opposite say over and over: oh, we spend way too much money on education in Alberta, and we don't get the results that we should get. Now, there are actually a lot of complex reasons for that. The solution is not to simply spend less money or to argue that, you know, we do everything badly and that teachers are at fault for all of this. There are a number of reasons. I mean, we have two parallel public school systems, which means that we have parallel bus systems, parallel boards, parallel staffing, all those kinds of things. There may be good reasons for those, but when you compare to the cost of education in other provinces, you have to take that into account, because every other province does not actually have that, so the cost attributed to that needs to be considered when we make these sorts of wild statements: oh, we spend too much on education because we spend more per capita than other people. Well, why do we?

Maybe it's a decision that Albertans want to take: yes, we will spend more per capita than others because we value having these two parallel public systems. That's totally fine. You know, I'm not here to make that an issue of huge discussion. I respect the history of this province and the choices that Albertans have made over many, many years. But let's not conflate costs that have historically been put in place, because that's what Albertans have chosen, with teachers' salaries or educational outcomes and then sort of say that the whole system deserves to be privatized because we can't do it more efficiently and not look at what are some of the real contributors to the higher level of costs.

All I'm saying here is that with the proliferation of charter schools the same kind of thing can begin to happen. Maybe we have to suddenly deal with, you know, the inefficient demands for transportation, the inefficient demands for capital, the inefficient demands for certain specialized resources in very small schools because we've decided to establish yet another charter school right next door to what was otherwise a public school that now has half the students. I mean, it just doesn't make sense.

Personally, I'm a huge fan of, you know, community schools, at least for K to 6. I think that, at the end of the day, with the value of having the community that has developed have kids in a geographic area going to the same school, with parents knowing each other, kids knowing each other after all those years, with the teachers knowing the kids, all that kind of stuff, it's one of the most fabulous examples of community that I've seen in my life, quite honestly. It's really quite lovely, and, you know, we should not throw it away

on a whim so that we can all get into our vehicles and drive 20 K to our select school. Frankly, the value of just that sense of community and the longevity that comes from that really cannot be overestimated. I know many, many parents believe that, too, and that's why they get so passionate about seeking new schools in new neighbourhoods that are overflowing with kids. Of course, those parents desperately want their kids to be able to go to new schools that are built in their community so that they can have that kind of community engagement and know the kids on the soccer field, know the parents on the soccer field, and have those many years together. Parents are passionate about that.

We know that many communities are challenged. We have communities that are growing at huge rates, and we have not over many, many years kept up with the demands for new schools in those new communities. Our government tried very hard to start to meet those demands. We built roughly 250 schools over our tenure. Quite frankly, it was something that had built up over a decade or so, so even those 250 schools, you know, have not yet met the demand or fixed the problem.

*12:20 p.m.*

The only reason I talk about that is because we know we have an unmet demand. It's a very universally accepted unmet demand, something that matters a great deal to young families in growing communities across this province. As we seek to meet that demand, we need to be efficient in the use of our resources. What I am saying is that if we are not very careful about the proliferation of additional charter schools, we are going to find ourselves using our resources in a less efficient way than we otherwise would. That is the point of that, and that is the concern that I have, in part, with Bill 8. We might find ourselves now with a proliferation of new charter schools, understanding that some of them do serve a purpose, but I think we need to be very careful. If we suddenly see them increase by 400 per cent, well, then, what we've just done is that we've pulled money off the public system, and invariably what we will have done is delayed the opening or the construction of new schools in communities that are overflowing with young families who desperately want their kids to be able to go to school in the community in which they reside.

Just as an aside, you know, sometimes this job – I'm sure everybody here, certainly everybody over the last 24 hours, has noticed that this job can be a little bit all-consuming. As a result, you don't get to do all the things you'd like to do. About a week and a half ago it was a joy in our neighbourhood. We had a whole bunch of parents who had all been together at the preschool, which lived in the elementary school, which was right beside the child care. All our kids had been in that preschool together from when they were about three. They've all now graduated and are on their way, in many cases, to university or whatever new stages in life. All the parents got together – whatever that would have been: more than 12 years. It would have been 14 years after we all met at our community school. Our kids have sort of followed in one form or another many trails together since that time. That's why people like community schools so much. It's because they just give a foundation and a home to kids and families for so many years.

Anyway, the charter school thing is something that I think we need to be careful about. So, too, should we be careful about the matter of the trustee code of conduct and recall.

I am looking at a few of the other issues here. Other than that, what remains our primary concern with respect to Bill 8, of course, goes back to the matter of what we are doing to undermine the rights of LGBTQ2S-plus students in our schools across the province. Once again, it is so clear that . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford standing to speak.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the main bill as I've had an opportunity to speak to a number of amendments today. It brings us back to some of the central points that we'll be debating, hopefully, over the next few hours.

I'd like to just start with a little conversation about kind of the nature of the difficulties that we have here. I understand that it is intrinsic to the nature of conservatism to want to conserve, to want to prevent change, and that the basic fallback stance within any kind of a conservative aspect of any movement or organization or so on is to not allow change and growth to occur but, rather, to retain that which exists at the present time. I think that on occasion it makes sense to do that.

I myself have been an advocate for retention of some of our historic buildings in the city of Edmonton, the desire to retain those buildings even though I know that if we were to take them down and build larger, more modern buildings, we might be able to include more people in them. We might have finer amenities. Sometimes when I was sitting in my minister's office in this building, however, I had a desire to see some change and maybe some upgrading of the nature of the offices. Some of the aspects or the condition of the office are more than 100 years old and therefore not very functional. But I still had a bit of a conservative bent, saying: yeah, but this building has been around for 100 years, and I guess it's okay if my fireplace doesn't actually allow fires anymore.

You know, that's sort of the nature of conservatism, that you sometimes want to retain things even though there are social influences and impulses that are moving us along and encouraging us to replace old with new. For example, we have invented modern, wonderful things like central heating, and central heating is fully capable of keeping this building warm without setting individual fires in every minister's office in the morning, as they once did in this building. So there's a conflict there sometimes between the impulse for conservatism to retain that which is, which I have because I admire the construction of the room and the history of the room and that which it offers to us and a sense of place and a sense of knowing who we are as we move forward, yet at the same time it's in conflict with: things could be improved, and things could be better.

I get that. I'm sympathetic to the government side of the House. They come from a place of conservatism that always tends to take the first step back and not wish to see changes happen. I know that that's kind of the history of conservatism in politics in general, that when new ideas come forward, the desire of conservatives is to not trust that it will be a positive change, to look into the change as a destruction of the good that we know now, today. I know that when, for example, in England the movement for public education began, some of the social reformers – in social work we often view them as some of the earliest social workers; even though they didn't always use that name, they began to use that name at that time – began to suggest that public education was a great opportunity to bring improvement to the conditions of life in Britain. It was, of course, a very complex movement that sought to change issues around poverty, sought to change issues around housing, sought to change issues around the distribution of wealth, sought to make changes in terms of education.

Technology was often a significant part of that in that there was a time when there were so many coal fires in the city of London that there was an actual fog in the city every day, regardless of the actual weather, for a significant period of time. This is, you know, simply

recorded history, and in fact some actual art forms were the result of that. They started to paint pictures with this fog inherent in the picture, and it actually led to a move, a shift, in England at the time from a kind of realist portraiture to something of a more abstract portraiture.

*12:30 p.m.*

You know, I think that when those kinds of things happen, we're in conflict. What happened was that some people wanted to move forward to this new electric light system and electric heating system. Others said: no, we'll lose all the coal jobs, so we don't want to move forward. There's a conflict there, and it was often referred to as the Luddite activity at the time, people saying that they did not want to move forward because they were scared about what would happen. If we began to bring in industry that didn't require people to dig coal or we brought in industry that didn't require people to walk treadmills in order to turn water mills and other things of that nature, then people would lose their jobs. So there was a conservative impulse to not allow those kinds of innovations into the industry of the time.

I think I have some sympathy for the Luddites because I'm not sure they were always just saying that they didn't want to move forward.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. I am struggling to bring this line of debate to the topic at hand of Bill 8. If you could please just clarify that for me, that would be very much appreciated.

Thank you.

**Mr. Feehan:** Sure. I'm sure that you've experienced with me before that I have a bit of a bent toward putting the decisions we make now into a historical context and feel that it's important that we understand that the decisions that we're making today, in this case on Bill 8, are based in a history of progress and moving forward in society that has both the opponents and the advocates challenging each other in terms of what is actually better and what is not.

Bringing it to Bill 8 in a more specific and direct way, I think that we're often in that place with this kind of conversation. What has happened is that we have been moving forward, and that's caused a discomfort to some people, people who approach these kind of progressive movements from a place of conservatism; that is, to conserve. As a result, we have a challenge, and the government has to make a decision. Are they going to advocate for the change because they can see the benefits of that change, or are they going to listen to those people who at one time were described as Luddites, or people resisting the introduction of change in society, and prevent the change from moving forward?

Now, in this particular case, we looked at the history of human rights in the province of Alberta and, of course, in most western democracies and saw that since the 1960s we had made some significant changes in terms of labour legislation, the attitude toward labour, and also toward sexual orientation rights in society. That movement has moved forward, but not everybody has bought into that change, not everybody has said that this is a good change. When we incorporated gay rights into the Canadian Constitution in the 1970s and got the government out of the bedrooms of the people, as was often the expression in those days, there were some people who did not feel that that was a positive progress forward, and we still have that going on today.

If we look at the decision that was made in the last bill that was introduced by our government in 2019, we see that a number of changes that were made were resisted by segments of society. The

end result was that when there was a request for safe and caring school policies to be instituted across the province of Alberta, well, the vast majority of people took the step to move forward and to implement these new policies that were coming forward. There were some, I think, 28 schools that did not. What we see now is the government making the decision in this Bill 8 to step back with that group of conservators, people that are unhappy to see us move forward on this progress that we've been working on for many years. I'm concerned about that.

Let me tell you a little bit why I'm concerned about that. As I do for the Luddites, as I mentioned earlier, I have sympathy for people that are concerned and worried about the progress toward protecting rights in these ways. It has a very particular influence that I have addressed previously in this House but that has not been addressed by the government side in any way. No one has stood up and responded to me, so I'd like to go back to that concern, and that is that we are creating a situation here where three factors are happening simultaneously and are going to interact with each other and create a larger problem than they would individually, by themselves. In combination they are creating a specific problem that we need to be very concerned about as we look at Bill 8.

One of those is that we are encouraging more charter schools in this province. Now, I understand that that is something that would satisfy that small group of 28 schools that don't wish to implement the policies that everyone else has been able to meet, and I understand that the impulse not to do that comes from, you know, a group of people who are conservative in their nature and wish to conserve what they have now and not introduce what they view as progressive policies into their school systems. They are vehemently opposed to the progress. I mean, Mr. Carpay, for example, compared the pride flag to the Nazi swastika. That's a fairly strong comparison, one that, if it were made in this House, would get quite a reaction, I assure you.

As a result, we are dealing with a group of people who do not want to see that progress, and we are responding to them but in a way that says that they will be able to have control. While not having control over all of the schools in the province of Alberta, they will be able to have control over some schools in Alberta. We're going to increase the number of schools in Alberta that will fit into that sort of Luddite focus on the progress that we've been trying to make here with the implementation of our School Act, that is being reversed by Bill 8 here today. I'm concerned about that.

What also concerns me is that the nature of these charter schools is such that they're often reflective of a particular world view, and sometimes that's associated with a religious world view or some kind of a cultural world view. There is a reality that in many places, particularly in northern Alberta, the members of some of these world views are concentrated. In Edmonton, of course, you know, if one small religious group or social group or cultural group were to want to have a separate school so that they can continue in some of their conservator kind of ways, then it wouldn't have a dramatic effect on the rest of the population because there would be many, many other schools in the neighbourhood for people to choose from.

*12:40 p.m.*

However, with the increase of the number of charter schools in these communities where it is a cohesive group of people who are increasingly moving toward becoming a majority in small communities – in some small communities they clearly already are a majority – we will be in a position that the only schools that will become available are the charter schools because they simply have got the population to make the determination that they no longer wish to participate in the public schooling system and choose to

build a charter school. They don't even need to convince their local school board to participate in a local charter school.

The third arm of what concerns me here is that these charter schools can exist in places where there is not even a local school board to supervise those charter schools. As a result, we can have schools that are associated with not the local community but a community that extends farther out into the province so that a school in northern Alberta will be responding to the desires and needs of a school board or an entity in southern Alberta. Now, this is very disconcerting for people in small communities in northern Alberta and, as I mentioned, particularly for indigenous communities because they are concerned about the possibility that their public schools will become unviable given that they simply don't have the numbers or the wherewithal to prevent a charter school from being created in their own community. Then a significant number of the students in that small community will shift over to the charter school, and the public school will no longer be available because the numbers in the community do not warrant maintaining the school.

We know that in the cities, the big cities, when local schools shut down, there's a lot of concern from community members about the loss of their local school and how it's going to affect them. They are only having to make a shift of driving maybe 10 or 15 or 20 blocks to a new school alternative, yet they have come forward and anticipated that that is a problem. Now we are in a place where people won't be able to simply shift over 20 blocks to go to a new school but may have to drive an hour or more to find a new school if the one in their community turns into a charter school. So I think I'm very concerned about that possibility because they can't deal with that either, by, you know, voting in a new school board, because that's no longer relevant to the case of the charter schools. In fact, in most First Nations communities they can't even vote for the school board anyways if they happen to live on-reserve.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

We have a problem where people are very much disenfranchised from the control of the school system in which their own children go, and as I have mentioned before, this is a traumatic echo for many people in the indigenous community, who have had the experience of schools being brought into their community with a particular world view over which they had no control and which resulted in what they would describe as traumatic destruction of their own communities. So even if it's not the intent, my concern is that we are increasing . . .

**The Chair:** Are there other speakers wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to listen to my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford kind of put things into historical perspective and to bring it to the present day with regard to Bill 8 before us, the Education Amendment Act, 2019.

There are three things I want to touch on, Madam Chair, and I will do those quickly. The first one I want to talk to is trustees putting one of their own members off the board, as is identified in Bill 8 and was talked about by the Leader of the Opposition just a few minutes ago. You know, this is my seventh elected position, five on council and two here, and in that time I've gotten to know, certainly on council, a couple of dozen elected city councillors in Calgary. Some of them lasted. You know, one was recognized last week, former city councillor Dale Hodges, for 30 years on that city council. But typically it's a shorter time period. My own was 15 years, and that's about the average, nine to 15 years. I can tell you that we had effective ways of dealing with city councillors whose

participation on that city council started to fall outside the norm or was less than constructive or helpful, but we never had what we see here, which is potentially a way of trustees ganging up on somebody to put them off the board for, perhaps, their views or their orientation or other things.

Effective ways to deal with trustees or councillors whose views are not helpful to the group going forward for the work they're doing or have become something that lies outside of normal behaviour for that council, are not to support their motions and not to support their efforts to change things. They quickly understand that if they want to be effective in their job, in our case it was 14 city councillors and the mayor, you have to get eight votes, Madam Chair. Eight votes can only come by convincing others of your position, and your position has to be one that people understand, that people believe is in the greater good, in our case it was the city of Calgary. Ways to manage people who don't go down that line are to say, "No, you won't get seconded," so it doesn't get on the floor in the first place, or "No, you can't get my vote because of all of these other things that are starting to line up that you're doing."

I was fortunate to be on some really effective city councils in the past, but there were people on those councils whose views, whose intent was to throw sand in the wheels of government, to downsize the bureaucracy because they felt there shouldn't be a bureaucracy working on this, that, or the other thing. It was clear after a while. They weren't there for the good of the city and the organization addressing the needs of the city. They were there with an agenda that was, as I said, to throw sand in the wheels of the organization.

The way that I dealt with that person – actually, there was more than one person over the course of 15 years. The way that many on the councils I was part of dealt with that person was to say: "No. You can bring forward a notice of motion, but I will never support that notice of motion. Have at 'er." Madam Chair, they get up and they put their notice of motion forward, and it drops like a stone in the ocean. They realize that if they want to have an agenda, they want to create a legacy of work that moves things forward, it can't be something that is totally an antithesis to why everyone else is there.

Bill 8, Madam Chair, goes too far. It goes too far. It's not the right thing, the right, perhaps, weapon, the right action for trustees to take against one another. The way it was – and I can tell you that there have been boards of trustees in Calgary that were not workable. I think I heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about one in the Edmonton area. I can tell you that I know well one in Calgary. In fact, one of the members of that trustee group was an elected MLA for the PCs after a period of time.

*12:50 p.m.*

The Minister of Education at the time heard repeatedly that that board of trustees was not working, so he took, in my view, a pretty significant action and dismissed the entire board. I remember those days because while I didn't do it personally, I know many people who complained to the Minister of Education. They said: look, you've got to do something. Had that board of trustees had this power, I have no idea how things would have worked out. The way they did work it out was a transition from having a sole person in charge of the Calgary board of education for a period of time and then elections again, and a new board of trustees was put in. That seemed workable. It worked. It was pretty drastic, but it dealt with the issue at the root instead of a group of trustees ganging up on one or two or potentially more trustees and having them off the board. I think Bill 8 should be revised, should be changed in that regard. I hope it is recognized by the government that what they're putting forward is not something that's in the best interest of boards of education across the province.

The next thing I want to talk about is GSAs, QSAs and to tell you a little bit about my experience during the campaign that we all recently went through. One of the high schools in the riding that I was endeavouring to represent, Calgary-Buffalo, was Western Canada high school. They had an election forum, and their student council, government council, put it on, sponsored it. The forum, of course, was well attended by students during the school time, about 300 or 400 young people. All of the clubs were represented there. They had us up at the front. I was there. Of course, the UCP candidate was there, and the AP candidate was there. All of us were represented. They asked specifically about this issue. They said: what are your views with regard to QSAs, GSAs and continuing them the way we have them in Western Canada high school? We all answered in turn. My answer was, you know: the work that the government that I was part of did to support young people in schools would continue. That was my commitment. It was not to change QSAs, GSAs in any way, shape, or form; to continue with Bill 24.

The UCP candidate said, and I'm paraphrasing because I don't remember exactly what that person said: look, I'm socially progressive; I support you. He was stopped by the young people, and they said: yeah, it's good that we know your views, but if you get elected, what is your government going to do? He said, again paraphrasing: I will try to influence the government that I'm a part of to keep the protections in place. I thought that that was not the best answer because he was kind of saying: look, vote for me; I'm with you, but, you understand, it may not work out that way for you in the end.

I think it's incumbent upon all of us – all of us – in this Chamber to not roll back important rights that young people have now garnered.

I look at some of the correspondence that has been raised as a result of this issue, Bill 8, in particular. One stuck out to me. It's from a constituent in Calgary-Buffalo, copied to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and the Education minister. It talks about the immense sadness this person feels watching the road which our great province is beginning to walk down as it relates to LGBTQ2S-plus individuals. It says that the truth and fact is that by removing the language, by making it not okay to use "gay" or "queer," rolling back protections currently in place, we send a negative message. It goes on and on and on and on, and it's essentially this person pouring out their feelings around how important this one issue is for them. This one issue: if it has this much import for this person – and they don't identify themselves as being a queer person; they are just saying that this is how they feel about this issue – can you imagine how significant it is for a young person who is not knowing if they're queer or not and finding that their views are no longer tolerated or appreciated in the most important place they have during their young life, which is school? We'd like to think it's home, but at a certain point in time it is not home; it is with their peer group.

Another letter that I got is from the Holy Spirit Lutheran church, the reverend there. This person says clearly that the amendments brought forward in the Education Act also do not hold the same protections for youth, and the UCP government has removed the provision that would compel principals to immediately approve a GSA once a student has requested one. It goes on and on and on in that same vein.

I can tell you that the principals that I've met have been incredible individuals. The one that I met at – I forget his name, and I spent the whole morning with him at a graduation where 701 students crossed the stage that one day. I can tell you that that's a long day for not only the people who are celebrants on the stage but for the people in the crowd, but it was wonderful. Students had a love for

that principal that was clear and evident, and I know, because of visiting, that that person would never do anything to not support one of his students in whatever fashion they needed. So I can't support this bill on that basis as well: the trustees putting one of their own off the board; QSAs, GSAs not having the same protections as Bill 24.

I have a dear friend. He's known to many people in this city and was a city councillor for 15 years here, Michael Phair. Michael, in 1992, was elected for the first time to Edmonton city council and ran as an out, openly gay man . . .

**Ms Notley:** One of the first.

**Member Ceci:** Not one of the first. The first in Canada.

. . . and he changed things in this country as a result of his strength and power to come forward and his belief that he had every right to sit at a city council table and to put his views forward and to support the community that he was a part of. The actions that Bill 8 takes will make it more difficult for young people who are queer, who are gay to see their role in society, to believe that they have just as many rights, just as much right in this country, in this province to be anything they want.

*1:00 p.m.*

Michael came from the States, so he was a transplant, but he was involved in this city in incredible ways since he first arrived. Perhaps – perhaps – it was because of the acceptance of his family, his schooling, his community that he had the strength to put up with the homophobic reactions that he experienced running for council. He and I met early in my tenure – in 1995 I got elected – and we bonded because of his humour, his knowledge, and the ability for him to bring people together. Michael was always, is always a uniter, a builder, a communicator.

He and I have talked about Bill 8, and he was on the steps protesting a couple of weeks ago with 400 or 500 or 600 people – I can't remember the number – who believe that Bill 8 is a step back in this province. It's an affront to the important work that has been done, and I just wish members on the other side could understand that our role is not to put roadblocks in the way of anyone's experience. Our role is to help develop capacity, help give enough space so that Albertans can live and let live in ways that are good for them, their families, their communities, and this province.

When you put Bill 8 in front of people and say, "What do you think?" I would say that there are some parts of it, maybe the more – I don't know – mundane or nerdy parts like leadership, professional practice certification, updated standards of professional competence for teachers and educational administrators, that are really important, but do they generate a lot of fire in people's bellies? Not personally. There are parts of Bill 8 that I can live with that pretty much reflect or are the same as in Bill 24, which our government took part in, made, built, created after consultation, after work, work, work to get it there, after pulling it apart and trying to figure out if it's in the best interests of Albertans, after recognizing that it wasn't everybody in this province who agreed to it. It was an improvement over the previous government's School Act.

That's where we were, and we were moving on, Madam Chair, to other important issues. This return to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, I believe will not be in the best interests of this province and should not be supported.

The third thing I didn't talk about was charter schools.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, are there any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to continue debate in the House today and have the chance to speak afresh to Bill 8. We've had the opportunity throughout this debate to share a number of stories from individuals, with various perspectives, on their experiences within the Alberta school system, specifically on the area around the formation of and participation in a GSA or a QSA at their school.

You know, recently we had the Alberta NDP Provincial Council in Red Deer. I had the opportunity there to speak with one of our party members and one of our supporters, who told me about her experience as a teacher here at a Catholic school in Edmonton, she herself being a member of the LGBTQ2S-plus community. Now, what she told me was that she had had students who approached her and said, "We would like to start a GSA in our school." She was excited. She was enthusiastic. She said: "Absolutely. Let's have a meeting this Friday." That was the way it worked for any other group in that school. If students wanted to start a group, they simply did it. If they wanted to have a chess club, they simply brought in a chess board and sat down in the cafeteria or a spare room on Wednesday afternoon and – boom – the chess club was born. In this teacher's view, this is simply another student club: "We will do the same. This Friday, absolutely, let's meet in this room. For anyone that's interested, we will start a GSA."

They saw a pretty good turnout for that first meeting, sort of testing the waters to see what the interest would be. They had about 10 students that came and expressed interest. As was appropriate at that point, then, when they saw that they had enough interest and that it was something that would be likely to continue, they went to talk to the school administration and said: "We've had an initial meeting. We've got 10 kids who are interested. We'd like to officially start this GSA." The first thing that the administration at that Catholic school said was, "Can we call it something else?" They weren't comfortable with them calling it a gay-straight alliance and tried to convince them that it should have a different name. When the teacher and the students did not want to budge on that particular point, they then began telling them how the meeting should be conducted and that it needed to open with a prayer. Again, this is administration attempting to impose on students the manner in which they should conduct their own student club meeting.

They were also not big fans of that. At that point, then, they were told, "Well, the head office" – so, again, now we're going beyond the actual school administration, further up the authoritative chain within the Catholic school system – "said that you would need to submit a proposal to be reviewed by the head office." Now, to be clear, Madam Chair, they did not require the chess club to submit a proposal to explain what they would be doing, which chess boards they would be using, what moves they would be discussing, which chess masters they would be studying. They did not require any of the other school clubs to submit a written proposal before they were allowed to begin their work. But this gay-straight alliance, which they would prefer not be called a gay-straight alliance, was asked to do so. That teacher again refused and said that that is not what is required for any other club in this school, so we will not be doing that either.

They went ahead with that gay-straight alliance, and interestingly this teacher told me that later on some of her teaching colleagues, as they were sitting in the staff lunchroom, would casually lean over and ask her: "I hear you've got this gay-straight alliance going. So who are the gay kids?" This was a topic of conversation, directly being asked by her colleagues, to out students who were participating in that GSA. This was the level of understanding, this was the level of sensitivity that was present there in that school. That teacher ended up later resigning from the Catholic school board, in part because of the experience she had with wanting to

start something as simple as a gay-straight alliance for students or to merely support the students who wanted to start it – to be clear, it was student requested, student led; she was there as support – but also because she herself, as a queer woman, wanted to have the opportunity to be a mother.

*1:10 p.m.*

She wanted to be a single mother, by choice, but she had seen a colleague of hers in the same situation who was put through disciplinary hearings and blacklisted by that school board and within that school system because she made a lifestyle choice of which they did not approve. She herself decided that she could no longer work within that school system, and she now works as a public school teacher. That is why the amendment that was brought forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was such an important one, and it's regrettable that it was not adopted.

I share that story to give context to what we are talking about and why we are so concerned with the changes this government is choosing to make by stealth, not choosing to make them in the light of day, not having chosen to be explicit in their platform about their intent in introducing this hollowed-out and gutted Education Act. These are the realities, these are the experiences of people within these systems. That is why it is so important that we have explicit statements of protection, that we make it one hundred per cent clear.

It's concerning to me that it seems to be the view of this government, based on, I think, what I would hope is a minority of their party membership, though a majority did vote for some troubling motions as part of their policy conference that they had back in 2018, to recognize that there seems to be a group of people who feel that what needs to be said to LGBTQ2S-plus students and teachers within our systems – within our public school system, within the Catholic school system, within private schools where they may be – is: "You're asking for too much. Settle down. Take a little water in your wine. We've given you something. Quit asking for more."

In a province where, for those who support them, they feel they must give the best – a lower youth minimum wage, the lowest corporate taxes, all these other things – at whatever cost that may come to other people, when it comes to the simple request to respect the human rights of members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community to be who they are, to honestly express themselves, to be allowed to get together with other people who share that identity or support that identity unencumbered, without obstacle, without interference, then this government turns and says: "That is too much. You're making us uncomfortable." That is troubling to me, Madam Chair, but that is precisely what we are seeing happen with this bill and precisely what we are seeing as members in this House choose to sit in silence and not provide any justification for why they want to take that step.

Speaking again of personal experiences, I have here a letter that was written by Laura Ross-Giroux of Taber, Alberta. She says:

I am not a member of the LGBTQ2S+ community, I am not the mother of an LGBTQ2S+ child but I am an ally and I will fight to the bone to provide a safe place for LGBTQ2S+ children.

She goes on to explain why. She says:

Many years ago, when I was in junior high school, a very close friend started to self-abuse. She began drinking quite heavily, and then started experimenting with many different types of drugs, not always pleasantly. My other girlfriends and I couldn't understand what had happened to her, she was such a wonderful, happy person, or so we thought. As we progressed into high school, her self-abuse became much worse and she ended up in several abusive relationships, she was falling apart before our eyes, self-destructing and there seems there was nothing we could do to help her. Thankfully she felt safe enough to confide in me

that she struggling with her sexuality, she thought that she might be a lesbian, she was hurting and . . .

tragically, Madam Chair, she says that her friend felt ashamed.

All I could do was to sit with her and hold her while she cried on my shoulder. I felt so utterly helpless, there was nowhere and no one in the school that she could confide in other than me. She began to slowly drift away from our group and from school, it broke my heart when she dropped out and joined the armed forces. I saw her only once after that and I regret that I was not able to follow up with her. Recently, I found her online and sent her a message, but it is totally up to her whether she chooses to respond to me. I hope [that] someday . . . she will. I will just tell her that I love and miss her, and [that] I hope she found happiness.

Within my own extended family, some of my young LGBTQ2S+ cousins have struggled with coming out and have tried to take their own lives but my wonderful family, for the most part, have been loving and supportive and we have shown them that we love them just for who they are and we are educating our older generation and some of my generation, about today's realities, the pain and confusion that these kids go through. In the intervening years, I had hoped that things had gotten better for our queer youth but in so many ways, they have not. We all remember how hard it was to be a teenager, how we were finding our own ways, our identities, ourselves, we were so insecure, so vulnerable; now imagine having to pretend every day of your life, not being allowed to express yourself, having to hide your emotions, being afraid of letting others know who, you feel to the core of your being, you truly are, [out of] fear of being bullied or worse.

Repeatedly, I would hear of suicide attempts, of self-harming, of children being thrown out of their homes by unaccepting parents and having nowhere to go, no support. The one bright shining hope we have are Gay Straight Alliances . . . if our schools had [these] groups all those years ago, my friend and many others within my own family could have found [the] help, support and community that they so desperately needed, they would have had the comradery and comradeship of their peers, they would not have had to be alone. Unfortunately, so many of our kids do not have that kind of support at home and that [is] the value of GSAs, safe places, supportive places, places where you can come out [at] your own pace, in your own way, no questions asked. These children deserve every advantage we can give them, as every child does, and finding safety within a GSA is something we should do everything within our means to provide. All our children warrant our love, our support, our best.

Words of personal experience, Madam Chair.

As I discussed earlier during this debate, what we are talking about, again, is a question of balance and whose power we need to balance here. Ultimately, Madam Chair, what this comes down to is the right of youth to feel safe in their school, the right of youth not to feel that they are being judged by those who are there, frankly, to serve them, who are there for the purpose of those students' education and betterment. Regardless of whether they are in a public school, a Catholic school, or a private school of any form, they should not have to look to their school charter and feel that it is judging them for who they are.

But it seems to be the view of this government that the right of an institution to express its values trumps the right of these students to be able to attend a school without a feeling of judgment or threat. It's interesting to me, as I said early on in this debate, that on this particular point that is the feeling of this government and that is the direction that it is choosing to go, that these students are asking for too much to be able to attend a school that does not have an explicit charter telling them that they are wrong, that they are bad, that who they are is unnatural because of the rights of that institution to hold those beliefs, to hold those values, and to express them publicly even to the detriment of the students it is there to serve.

1:20 p.m.

Yet as soon as that child graduates high school and moves from grade 12 to their first year of university, this government immediately does a 180-degree flip on its view, and all of a sudden the rights of that student to express themselves, their rights to express who they are and the values they believe in, one hundred per cent trump any postsecondary institution that they should choose to attend, because that is the intent of this government. The Minister of Advanced Education has indicated that he will be moving forward with requiring all postsecondary institutions within the province of Alberta to guarantee free speech on their campus, yet the only difference for a student who is 17 and in grade 12 is that they are in grade 12 and it's maybe a bare difference of four months between whether they have the right to that self-expression in their school or not.

This, to me, makes no sense, Madam Chair. Either the right of self-expression is inherent and should be there for youth regardless, or it resides solely with the institution and should stay there thereafter. But it's interesting to watch how this government twists itself in knots to try to justify giving institutions the power to question, to denigrate the identity of students and who they know themselves to be.

We'll continue to have this debate regardless of whether this government wishes to or not, regardless of whether they choose to greet the morning today with a series of memes complaining about the fact that the opposition is doing its job and holding them to account on legislation and representing the views of our constituents. On this particular issue, it is one, as I have said, that I believe is of such great and significant importance. These are the very lives and identities of these young people.

Let me tell you, Madam Chair, weighing again in the balance the slight offence that it causes a particular school administration to not be able to loudly proclaim their particular beliefs in terms of discrimination against the LGBTQ community versus the great damage that that can do to a young life, I would say that those institutions should perhaps instead, then, simply choose to grow a thicker skin, that they find a way to hold their beliefs in such a way that they can personally hold that belief and maintain their personal integrity but don't have to endanger the health, mental and physical, of young people in order to do it.

That is the simple proposition in front of us and one which this government is apparently unwilling to have the courage to stand up for. That is why I will continue throughout this debate to rise in this House and speak against this bill alongside all of my colleagues, and after this debate is done and whatever decision is made by this House, we will continue to stand up for those constituents.

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

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my honour to rise today and continue our debate on Bill 8. Just to follow up on some of the words of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-City Centre, our opposition is asking the government to look at, really, three main pieces to this bill. These pieces are in place right now and have made a significant difference in the lives of LGBTQ students and, you know, greatly impacted the school system for the better, I must say.

Of course, one of them is about having to ensure that principals immediately do grant permission. By "immediate" we don't mean necessarily that that second it has to happen but, you know, within a window of about two weeks, a little bit of flexibility there. The concern, of course, is that principals may delay for quite a long period, perhaps an indefinite period, and that doesn't serve students

at all. Of course, also with that, we'd like them to designate a staff liaison, so fulfilling on this timeline to make sure that students have the support network that they need in a timely manner. We know that students don't need GSAs whenever; they need them now.

We know that students grappling with their sexuality often feel isolated. They feel unaccepted. They feel 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, as I've spoken about before in this House, it is fundamental to human beings that we need to belong. We're social creatures. We need to be connected to other human beings. If you feel like you're strange, you're different, whatever words you want, if you feel afraid to speak about it at all and you know that the atmosphere at home is not conducive to you sharing this, then students often feel isolated and keep it inside. But if there is a GSA created in a timely fashion, like, within that two-week window, we know that students have an opportunity to belong to a community that is inclusive.

I spoke previously in this House just about some of the challenges my middle son had when he was in elementary school, actually. He was a bit of a shy boy, and, you know, he was vulnerable. Kids, well, one in particular, did pick on him, and he was bullied. His natural inclination was, sadly, to just keep that to himself, to not reach out to his teacher, to his dad, to myself. He experienced this for a couple of years in elementary, and I never ever heard about this until he was in junior high. This really broke my heart. When I heard about it, I of course accepted him and supported him, but he had just been too afraid to actually talk about any of his concerns and this bullying by this other student.

My son is certainly part of the dominant culture, a heterosexual male, white, Caucasian, doesn't have any disabilities, so he had a tremendous amount of privilege in that, and still he suffered. He had tremendous concerns. He didn't belong. He was isolated, and it did sort of take away a lot of his connections with people for a period of time. Just imagine if there are other layers of concern for a child, that they're not part of that dominant culture. Like, they're sort of exploring the LGBTQ community, feeling like that's more of their orientation. They even more have a feeling of difference, a feeling of separation. That's why it's so fundamental that students do have access to these GSAs.

I know personally, as a mom with my son, how much that's negatively impacted his life. I must say, you know, that he's 20 now, but he still has some challenges connecting, and I think it has a lot to do with those experiences of sort of connecting with someone and then having them be quite cruel and a bully to him. But I just want to acknowledge that the challenges, the discrimination, the harassment that these students feel or experience is much greater than what my son experienced. I guess another thing that's different from what my son experienced was that when he did disclose and did express concern, you know, his family was there for him, and they would support him. He, sadly, chose to let it lie for many years.

*1:30 p.m.*

But some kids don't have that kind of safety, so in their homes they can't express truly their true selves because they won't be accepted in that environment. Support is completely unavailable to them. In some families it is so disturbing and challenging that students can't express themselves, and if they do, they may be kicked out. Many of my colleagues have talked about this.

We know from work with vulnerable youth that about 50 per cent of homeless youth identify as being part of the LGBTQ community. Those students, indeed, were not safe and could not express themselves but were compelled to because they felt that they wanted to be authentic and honest about who they are. If they had

had a safe haven, a place to share that in an environment that was confidential, respectful, inclusive, then indeed it might not have led to their being homeless. There might have been a safety plan created, support for them.

It's really so tragic that our current UCP government has decided not to make a specific time frame within which a GSA can be created. Again, I just want to reiterate that we're talking about probably a two-week window. So it doesn't have to be immediate, though we've talked about that, but just give a bit of time for the administration, the principal in specific, to create this.

As I've also spoken about before, certainly, all parents do not have the best interests of their children at heart, sadly, and it's not because, you know, they are evil people or something like that. It's not that at all. Oftentimes people have their own struggles and difficulties, and because of that, they're not making the best choices probably for themselves either and indeed for their family. A dependent youth who is in a situation like that: the parent may make a decision that isn't supportive.

So where does the student have to turn? We know that schools can really be places for students to feel like they belong and be accepted as they are. It's very important that these GSAs continue to be available to students in order for them to be supported in that environment.

As I said, of course, you know, parents aren't causing problems for their children out of malintent. A lot of parents are just troubled themselves. We know that Alberta has some of the highest rates of addiction, both drug and alcohol addiction, so if you're not of sound mind, it can be very difficult for you to make good decisions about your children. Also, parents may have mental health issues, and with mental health issues oftentimes people aren't thinking clearly. Sometimes they get so overwhelmed with their own angst and upset that they aren't able to actually be present and available to their children, and that's a real tragedy.

We also have extremely high rates of family violence in our province. So many kids are going home to the chaos of that kind of situation, where, because of the difficulty perhaps in the parental relationship, there is no space for any of the vulnerabilities of that child, and the parent, because they're so overwhelmed with those situations, can't be present.

Certainly, there is, you know, family breakdown. We have high divorce rates also, so that can really cause a lot of difficulty for a family system. Parents can be overwhelmed with those issues.

Issues of poverty, where families are stressed because they are hardly making ends meet, they can't put food on the table: this is just a challenge for them that they can't really deal with.

The family could be newcomers, the family could be a refugee family, or the family could have sort of more fundamentalist Christian views, so their value base may indeed not accept at all people from the LGBTQ community. In those cases, then, there's just no space for a child to be able to be authentic, to be able to be honest about what's going on. But if that child has access to a GSA, then that child will have an inclusive environment, a place where they can go and, maybe just for a little bit of time each day or each week, have a place that's safe for them. I really would like to stress to the government how important it is for students to have these safe spaces, because indeed they are, sadly, not available in their homes.

I think I shared with you some time ago, shared with this House, about a friend of mine who is in his mid-20s. He's a university graduate. He has an undergraduate degree. He's got an Asian background. He was born in another country, came over when he was in elementary school. He has a responsible job. He takes care of himself, lives independently, had all sorts of great success as a young man, but he still has not come out to his parents, is so concerned about their rejection of him. A GSA in a school would

have been such a huge support for him. He didn't have that when he went to school, but he did have that at university, and he in turn supported so many others to be accepted. I know from hearing stories that he shared with me that many times he was listening to the challenges, the pain and suffering of someone who was contemplating actually taking their own life because they felt so alien. There was no place for them. Indeed, some friends of his did take their own lives.

It's so significant, the importance of this. It just cannot be minimized, and to just leave it open-ended, that these can be created at any time, with no restrictions on timeline, really is – what do they say? Justice delayed is justice denied. I just really want to stress to this government how important it is to have that timeline, that two-week window, so that a GSA can be created in a timely manner.

Just last week, you know, a local expert, Dr. Kristopher Wells – he's the Canada research chair for the public understanding of sexual and gender minority youth and an associate professor in the Faculty of Health and Community Studies at MacEwan University – wrote an opinion editorial in the *Edmonton Journal* on June 27. He, of course, is speaking strongly in support of our previous bill, Bill 24, in that GSAs need to be created in a timely manner, that two-week window that we spoke of earlier. I mean, his opinion editorial was excellent and talks about many facets of the challenges that students face and just some of the clear facts about the difference that GSAs make.

He talks about how research demonstrates that GSAs are an important intervention that . . . reduces risk and helps to build resilience, but can also save over . . .

And he estimates this, and this is per student.

. . . \$183,000 in future student-related health-care costs that result when discrimination and prejudice are allowed to flourish in schools.

Of course, Madam Chair, it is both sort of a human rights argument, that these children can congregate and be accepted for who they are, but it also has an economic argument that makes sense. Down the road, oftentimes there are more demands on the health system because of the challenges these students experience. Certainly, sometimes they experience trauma from the attacks they experience if they're not in a safe place or from not having that sense of belonging.

He also goes on to say:

Over 20 years of global peer-reviewed research indicates that LGBTQ youth are among the most vulnerable groups of students in schools today, with significantly higher rates of substance use, smoking rates, eating disorders, homelessness, depression, self-harm, and [suicidal ideation] when compared to their heterosexual peers.

These risk factors are not because of who LGBTQ are or how they identify.

It's not because of their authenticity. It's about

the compounding product of [the] discrimination, [the] harassment, and [the] prejudice, which all contribute to the development of unsafe school environments that impact the mental and physical health . . . and well-being of sexual and gender-minority youth.

**1:40 p.m.**

The Public Health Agency of Canada chimes in, too, and notes that schools are a critical site for targeted interventions to help reduce these risks, these significant risks that I just outlined, by supporting the development of protective factors. What are protective factors? Protective factors are inclusive policies and evidence-informed programs designed to help build resilience, increase safety, and improve mental health.

Most notably, research shows that GSAs are a vital public health intervention which not only create safer school climates for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth but also for heterosexual youth. We've referred to this study before. It was out of British Columbia, where they looked at almost 40,000 students in grades 7 to 12, and they found that the longer a student had a GSA, the greater its protective power was for all students, LGBTQ students but also heterosexual students.

Of course, one of the key pieces of this was the length of time that a GSA had actually been operating in that school. According to our legislation, Bill 24, a principal must immediately create a GSA; within a two-week window is what we're saying now. The longer that that GSA is available to students, the better the outcomes for all students, from one year to two years to three years, and that's because it shifts the perspective of the students, the teachers, other staff, everyone in the school, and the school becomes a much more inclusive environment.

This is significant, Madam Chair, that just a whole environment has shifted so that people of difference in many ways, like heterosexual boys who may feel like they're not – I don't know; what's an elite place? – on the football team or something like that, and they feel like they're not as good as someone else, well, actually feel more included in the school when there's a GSA. So it has a really cumulative positive impact on school climates and school safety.

Research unmistakably indicates that GSAs make schools safer, so it's hard to understand why this government is seeking to limit, weaken, or reduce their implementation. Rather than seeking to restrict GSAs, the UCP government should strive to increase support and amplify the impact in all schools. Unfortunately, Bill 8 does exactly the opposite of what the UCP claims it does. If Bill 8 is passed, schools will become less safe, policies more vague and ineffective, and both the LGBTQ and heterosexual students will suffer the long-term consequences. GSAs do not just change lives; they save lives, Madam Chair. Government legislation shows that at the very minimum, seeking to do no harm, Bill 8 will remove important protections and increase risk, impacting the health and well-being of all students.

It is legislation that is not supported by research or evidence, Madam Chair. That's a significant thing to ponder. Why are we moving to change this when actually the research and experience uphold the importance of what we did as the NDP government? Instead, it appears to be crafted out of wilful ignorance, ideological dogma, and perhaps prejudice.

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

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I really appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 8 in Committee of the Whole, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, that has been termed Bill Hate throughout this debate. I'd like to really emphasize some of the points that many of my colleagues have made, and I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Riverview because a lot of the information she was just sharing – the statistics, the facts about some of the challenges and barriers that exist for our LGBTQ2S community – I think are an important place to start when we're talking about this debate and when we're talking about this bill. Fundamentally, Bill 8 is being used to essentially erase changes brought in by our government under Bill 24, changes that were working to close loopholes and problems that existed in the earlier Bill 10. I will note that Bill 24 was not supported by the UCP members of this House who were members of the 29th Legislature during the debate on that bill.

But it was supported by groups like the ATA, who strongly supported Bill 24's clarification in providing teachers the confidence to know that they would not be responsible for making the judgment call on whether or not to out a student. Let me be clear that our caucus believes very strongly that LGBTQ2S rights are human rights, that all Albertans deserve to be treated with respect, and that Albertans themselves need to be the ones to decide when and how to come out, if that is a decision they want to make. Those views fundamentally drive the debate that we're having in this Legislature because what Bill 8 is doing is using a vehicle to weaken GSAs, to weaken protections for vulnerable students.

Now, in previous debates on this issue, I have taken the opportunity to share some of the statistics, and I note that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was taking a very similar approach. The reason that I think this is important is because as we debate this legislation, I think it's important for each member to hold in their mind the idea of who we are talking about. We are talking about youth who very often are put into difficult situations because they are more frequently the brunt of bullying and discrimination. They may or may not be in a community that is inclusive, welcoming, and accepting.

As a result of the challenges that they face for who they are, we know that nearly 1 in 3 homeless youth in Canada identify as LGBTQ2S-plus. We know that those youth primarily identify the reason for their homelessness as family rejection due to gender identity or sexual orientation. These are facts that we know. When we talk about the homeless youth in our province, let's remember that nearly 1 in 3 are members of our LGBTQ2S-plus community.

We know that these youth face higher rates of discrimination, violence, and abuse, and we know that these youth are at higher risk of mental health concerns and self-harm and higher rates of suicidality than the general population, and as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned in her comments, we know that it's not because of something intrinsically wrong with these youth. It is because of the systemic bullying, harassment, and intolerance that create stress and create challenges for these youth. Anything that we can do, particularly as legislators, to improve the outcomes for these youth is incredibly important.

We have decades of evidence showing that having GSAs and having strong protections for these youth improve outcomes for them, improve school completion, and improve life expectancy because we are talking about a group of youth that have higher risks of suicide, Madam Chair. We can't underemphasize that.

Please, to everyone who is listening to this debate, let's remember that we are talking about vulnerable youth who very often do not feel empowered, do not feel supported. When there are schools that have well-supported GSAs, we find that these youth have better outcomes and healthier, more productive lives, and that's what we want for all our students. I certainly appreciate the comments that all my colleagues have made.

*1:50 p.m.*

When Bill 24 was originally passed, a particular CBC article really stood out to me because the CBC had tracked down a student who was in a GSA. I wanted to share with this Chamber the story of Jane MacNeil, who came out to her parents when she was in grade 6, which was a very stressful, challenging thing for her and even difficult when she knew that her parents were very likely going to be supportive. She said: they're probably going to be cool. But it's still not an easy choice to make, so I will reaffirm that we need to make sure that every Albertan is making that choice when they are ready, that nobody is outed before they are ready.

Now, this young woman, in the Catholic school that she was attending, did not have a gay-straight alliance, and she shared that

she felt rejected and isolated to the extent that she transferred schools to a new school that had a GSA. At that point her life changed for the better. She called changing schools one of the greatest decisions she ever made in her life because she became more comfortable, happier, she was more supported. She even said that she had more friends.

When Bill 24 was passed, 23 MLAs voted against that bill passing. Now we have a UCP government that is introducing Bill 8 in a way that erases Bill 24. Bill 24 prevented teachers from outing students who joined a gay-straight alliance. The same CBC article talks about a teacher, Natasha Krec, a guidance counsellor and teacher in Wetaskiwin public schools, who said: Bill 24 added clarity to both the public and the teachers to make sure that students' confidentiality is respected and kept private; now teachers aren't put in that awkward position to out kids.

Another teacher who had been involved with GSAs said that GSAs save lives. That is a common thread throughout the debate. I'm sure you've heard this many times. But when you look into GSAs not only in Alberta but around the world, you see that GSAs save lives. You see that message over and over and over again. I would note to you, Madam Chair, that when you google GSAs, when you look into the discussions, the debate, the research around the world, Alberta seems to be fairly unique in its opposition to GSAs. In a lot of places you don't see the same kind of concerns and, well, legislation designed to undermine GSAs.

I would note that the student we originally started talking about, Jane MacNeil, did try to start a GSA at her Catholic school. At first the principal agreed – it was really important to Jane that she could be religious and express herself in the way that she did – but almost immediately she ran into a series of hurdles. The room where the meetings took place kept changing. The time kept changing. Teachers weren't allowed to attend, just the principal and vice-principal. "We voted," she says, "over six times on the name because they didn't want to have the word 'gay' or 'queer' in the name." Now, we've heard stories like this in this Chamber a number of times. My colleague from Edmonton-City Centre just told an almost identical story. This is something that was happening. We knew this was happening, which was why Bill 24 was necessary and why Bill 8 is a rollback on the rights of these students, why Bill 8 is a mistake on the part of this government.

MacNeil said that they voted over six times on the name because they didn't want to have the word "gay" or "queer" in the name. She also said: I don't know about you, but a chess club is called a chess club, and a gay-straight alliance should be called a gay-straight alliance. The good news for this student was that when she switched schools, everything changed. She felt safe in school. The GSA was almost school-wide because she felt safe everywhere, and we see this from the research, Madam Chair. Schools that have GSAs have fewer incidents of bullying, discrimination. Anti-LGBTQ language is used less frequently. It really changes the entire school, not just the students who attend the GSA. It does what we often say is important. It creates welcoming and inclusive spaces. It is effective, and it saves lives. For both the students and teachers that's exactly what they hope every school environment will be in the future, but for now they're glad that each school has a GSA that they can operate without worrying about outing kids. If Bill 8 passes, that will no longer be the case. That is why I and my colleagues are standing in this House to raise the issues in Bill 8, trying to make sure that everyone remembers who we're talking about. The kids in our communities, the kids we know: that's who we're talking about.

The student that I'm talking about goes on to say that being part of a GSA oftentimes is just about giving advice when we're going through something. It's often a safe place for youth to just come and be themselves. The community that it builds is supportive, and it's, of course, teacher supervised. Making sure that we hold in our mind what a GSA is, who attends it, and why it's important for them I think is really critical.

Now, what are my concerns specifically with Bill 8? I'm concerned that private schools will be exempt. We've heard some of my colleagues reading some of the founding documents of these private schools that essentially enforce heteronormative dress codes that impose views that, in my view, go against the basic human rights of our LGBTQ2S-plus youth.

Bill 8 also removes the immediacy when a student tries to create a GSA. We know that from the time when Bill 10 was enacted until our government enacted Bill 24, as we heard from Miss MacNeil, the student I was reading the story of, school administration would often delay or otherwise put barriers in front of students who wanted to form a GSA.

Please hold in your mind this picture. We're talking about vulnerable youth looking to start a school club, and the principal or the school administration that they are turning to for help is putting up barriers. That should not be allowed. That is why our caucus has put forward very clear amendments to reintroduce immediacy. That was not supported by the government, so we will be bringing forward more amendments to put more reasonable time frames around this. Why would it need to take three months for a GSA to be formed to support students? It makes no sense, and I have not heard a single member of the government caucus provide an explanation for why immediacy needs to be removed through Bill 8.

Of course, there are strong concerns that the employment protections for LGBTQ2S teachers are being removed through Bill 8, protections that were put in through Bill 24. Unfortunately, an amendment that would have reaffirmed those protections has already been defeated in this House. We heard through the debate, and I know all members listened intently, that, yes, there are human rights complaints avenues that a teacher could go through, but we're talking about – what? – 36 months for resolution when we could simply keep the protections we have today rather than undermining them through Bill 8.

These are some of my top concerns, and I certainly hope that through the debate members of the government caucus are not only hearing the words we're saying but are thinking about the members of their families and communities who may need GSA protections and that supportive school group in their lives. I would want that for the children in my life. I want that for the constituents in Mill Woods. If somebody needs a safe space, one that is proven to provide better outcomes for both the students and the school environment, why would we put any impediments to that? Bill 8 is an impediment. It's a bill to destroy gay-straight alliances. It's deliberately been penned to undermine the gay-straight alliances and their protections that have been put in place by previous governments. It will turn back the clock on the protections for LGBTQ2S youth who we know through the debate and through conversations with people in our communities are often vulnerable and are subject more often to homelessness, to mental health issues, to suicide, and to self-harm because of the environments they are in. I can't emphasize that enough. If you live in a world that rejects who you are, that's incredibly damaging.

2:00 p.m.

We can make sure that we have a world where all students are accepted, where we have safe and inclusive spaces. I'm pleased to

hear that members of the government caucus agree. To those members I would say: then why do we have a private school exemption in Bill 8? Why do you believe that students at private schools do not deserve the safe, inclusive spaces? Why have you removed immediacy? Why have you gone back to a system where we know, because we have the proof – we have the stories; we have the examples – that school administration has prevented vulnerable students from creating GSAs? If you say that you support safe and inclusive spaces, if you say that you support GSAs, why would you remove that immediacy clause? Why would you remove that clarity? Why would you remove employment protections for LGBTQ2S-plus teachers?

I have not heard an explanation from the government caucus. I want to believe them when I hear them say that they support GSAs, but actions are louder than words, and legislation is louder than words. This legislation undermines the protections for GSAs. It does that as clear as day. We continue to paint that picture to highlight the problems in this bill, and the government caucus, although they will quietly say things during debate from their seat, are not standing to respond in a clear way to the concerns. We hear very unsatisfying answers during question period when the minister is asked about these issues or when the Premier responds about these issues.

As with many other items up for debate, I feel this government has a real issue with misleading, misleading Albertans in making statements like: this will be the strongest protection. It won't. We currently have strong protections. Bill 8 undermines that. It weakens them. We know that in other provinces there are stronger protections. This has been proven through tablings – we've done certain media scrums to talk about this – and through the debate. I've seen that kind of a misleading tactic used on a number of different bills. We won't get into it, but we saw it with banked overtime, anyway.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Finances.

**Ms Gray:** With finances. Exactly. Finances are a great example as well.

The other piece that Bill 8 does is that it actually removes enforcement mechanisms. If we want public and private school boards to comply with GSA legislation, we will no longer have the enforcement mechanisms to make sure that they do. Bill 8, of course, is removing those protections from private schools. We just need to be clear about exactly what's happening here.

Now, I've talked primarily about my concerns with Bill 8 in the way that they impact our LGBTQ2S-plus students. There are a number of other changes in this bill. One of the interesting things is that originally the Education Act was written and consulted on, as I understand it – of course it happened years ago, and I was not in the Legislature at the time – with a focus on helping students to complete their education. A lot of those pieces are no longer a part of this Education Act that is before us today. Students being able to stay in school to an older age and be covered: that's been removed.

This bill also creates recall mechanisms for trustees, which a number of my colleagues have spoken out against because there are some serious concerns about publicly elected officials being able to be removed by other publicly elected officials. That certainly would be unheard of here, in this space.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Chaos.

**Ms Gray:** It could absolutely create chaos. I know I had the opportunity to listen to the Leader of the Official Opposition talk about some challenges that we had with school boards in just the last few years, where at one point they were even considering

trusteeship to come in. If at that time the school boards that were having challenges dealing with one another... [Ms Gray's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, we have a number of guests watching us here today. I don't know who you are, but welcome to the Assembly. We appreciate the audience; that is for sure. For those of you who have been here for a little while, welcome to the Alberta Legislature. We are debating Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows is standing to speak.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Once again I'm rising in the House to speak against Bill 8. It's really, actually, disturbing for me to see the direction this bill is trying to take us in. I would say that by proposing, by tabling this bill, the government successfully, probably, has distracted us from what we should have been discussing in this House regarding the education system, schools, students instead of what we are debating on this.

I participate, you know, every day in question period sessions, and I see, from both sides of the House, the questions we have from the hon. members. They want to know about the education funding. They want to know how the education system will be funded for the next four years. They want to know if the new students coming to school this year will be funded, that they will have enough teachers to take care of them.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I have also even seen the questions from the other side of the House, where their members are concerned about, you know, the deteriorating structures of their schools, their buildings, their communities. Instead of focusing on those issues, instead of coming together, discussing those issues, and coming out and laying down our plan on how we are going to fund the education system, we are debating Bill 8. What the major aspect of this is trying to do is basically weakening the fundamental rights of the vulnerable communities and also weakening the public education system.

Even during the election, before the election, and in the UCP platform the UCP always said that they will not touch social policies, that they will not try to legislate social policies. Even many times in the House our Premier and the members of this government have claimed that this is one of the best, you know, protections for the GSAs/QSAs that we have in this province.

Members, my hon. colleagues from this side of the House, continuously keep bringing forward the weaknesses. The fact is that this bill will in no way, you know, do any good for the most vulnerable students in the schools, but I don't see any positive response. This is very saddening to see. During all this debate, days and days of debate, on this bill the other side of the House, the government members of this House, did not probably see one single legitimate discussion or point we have discussed here. This is very saddening to see, that this is how democracy in modern society is going to work.

When we are discussing the points, we're giving the facts on how they are going to bring the changes in. They are going to weaken something that was already there, and the government every time claimed and reiterated their statements that, no, they're the big defenders of GSAs, that they're the big defenders of minorities. But then, in fact, this bill, this proposal, shows that it's going to have an attack on that. It is going to weaken the protections already provided in the law. The government, you know, regardless of their statements during the election or their statements in the House, did not really try to see the facts the opposition is trying to bring. Every

time they come up to answer, they provide the constant election-style rhetoric in response to the questions on these GSAs/QSAs during this bill.

2:10 p.m.

Basically, it should have been only focusing on the fundamental right of those who we care about instead of: we're trying to see, we're trying to create some kind of stereotyping as a GSA/QSA being something not really acceptable. This is the message; this is the clear message. You know, by the changes being proposed in the House and also witnessing or participating as a member of this House in the debate for the last number of days or weeks, I can see that this just eliminates lots of protections that were already provided to the community.

Now, much actually will depend on the person or the principal in charge, his commitment, his understanding of those issues, how really he wants to move forward when there is a request to form a GSA/QSA in the school. It really fails to impose a timeline on that. If there's a request, we're not asking for it immediately, even. In the given circumstances we're asking for the most responsible approach so that we at least protect the most vulnerable in the schools.

Coming from a very conservative family, a conservative culture, we know that even being a member of a minority community in the city or in the state, in the province, or in the country, you know, it's not easy to share your experience, the humiliation that sometimes you feel. As a government, as a public representative that is our job. That's why we open an office in the constituency. That's why we attend public events. That's why we engage people, not only the people who voted for us but each and every one, people living in your riding or maybe sometimes people if they don't live in your riding. That is our job. We listen to them.

We know that it is not easy for people to access help when they need it, especially when you feel that you were personally humiliated based on your orientation, your ethnicity, your religion, your colour, your culture. We see this every day. When people are driving a car, when people are walking on the sidewalk, they will be discriminated against. They will be bullied because of how they look. Even sometimes – we're all human beings. We all make mistakes, sometimes honest mistakes. Sometimes people commit mistakes.

It's different when someone, you know, is from a community that is not really looked at or accepted as the mainstream community. Even when you see it covered in reporting, you will see the different perspective. You will see people talking about this from a different perspective. As soon as it becomes about a person from a visible minority, it will change the direction. It will be totally different.

I know how hard it is for those people, the people who face this kind of discrimination, to come out and seek help. It's not even easy for you to talk to your family. I'm not talking about, like, legal help and social help. My colleagues already shared their experiences. It's not easy even to talk to your family or your siblings, and people keep that within them. That, you know, hurts their potential, that hurts them in life, and that haunts them in life for a long time.

In this case specifically, there are a lot of examples of GSAs and QSAs. If this bill passes, it will provide the option to schools to out a kid. If that happens, it's not only that vulnerable kid, like, only one single person who will suffer, who will suffer the pain, who will suffer for life, but it's also the wrong lesson, the wrong precedent. It will be a message to the community at large. What we are saying through this bill is that the protection that was provided before – it allows the school to out the kid.

What the government is trying to say is that the strongest protection in this province is the legal assistance the minor can seek,

and you can imagine how easy that is, to access legal assistance, even for us, even for us as elected members, people of privilege. That is the kind of protection my friends from the other side, the government side, think of, and every time they got up in the House, they were trying to claim that and reiterate it again and again.

Surely, you know, when some of these arguments in the bill were discussed here, I was, like, positive as a new member of the House that I would see some humility in this House, from both sides, and that we would hear some issues and find some common ground when it comes to representing our people, when it comes to protecting our people, helping our people. But, unfortunately, I did not really see this in the three or four weeks we were in the House, and that's very disheartening. That is not something that I can be proud of. That is not something where I can go out and proudly explain the decorum or the way that we, the elected representatives, behave and believe each other or respect each other.

When I see the government in this House, you know, they're really – how would I say it? – convinced that they're going to have to pass this bill within this limited time frame, when we have tried to elaborate on some very, very important issues that are related to the fundamental rights of human beings, the basic right to live. That is being challenged by this bill. I did not see any humility from the government benches, so that is very hurtful and that is very saddening.

2:20 p.m.

As I said initially in my starting words, this House should have been for us to discuss more how we can strengthen our education system, how we can strengthen the protection of our loved ones, how we can provide protection or strengthen the protection to the community at large. There's a lot to discuss in my community, in my riding. In my riding we have 11 per cent more population than the average ridings in the city. You know, I have no high schools in this riding. I was thinking that I'm going to go to the House and I'm going to represent my people, and these are the kinds of issues we will be discussing in the House. I can see how the members of the government, you know, are amused to keep focusing on this bill. They're so convinced to pass this bill and sway the discussion away totally from the issues that we should have been discussing in this House.

I'm contacting my constituents on a regular basis, as much as I can. We know that we are in the House, since we got elected, most of the time. I try to arrange meetings with the stakeholders in my riding and the members of my community in the riding. There are more issues about what can happen with their schools. There's chaos already. The courses are being transferred in three different schools because the schools' capacities are already full. They cannot really afford more students in those schools. They cannot afford to provide services and courses in those schools anymore. Those are the issues that the school board trustees are struggling with. Those are the issues the teachers are struggling with. Those are the issues that the superintendent of schools in our riding is struggling with. There's huge chaos.

There have been meetings where 300, 400 parents, you know, gather. They're coming out to the schools. Now the schools are closed. They're worried. They want to know before the end of the season what is going to happen to the schools when their kids come back at the beginning of the next session, in September of this year. Will their kids have those programs still there? Will their kids need to go to different schools? I had a meeting with school board trustees in my riding, and they didn't have answers. They said: "You know, school boards are trying to budget based on anticipations. We don't know what's going to happen, what form of budget we're going to have, what we will not have, what

programs will be funded by the government, and what programs will not be funded by the government."

With all those issues concerning the people in our riding, we do not even have a chance to discuss those issues, to come together. I know that every time the government leaders stand up in the House, they talk about the financial crisis, the depression, the economy. But that's why we are here as responsible people. We all committed to protect our health care. We all committed to protect our education system. Every time I see, in response to questions, a member of the government stand up – even the Education minister says that they're committed to provide the . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak? I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise in the House today to speak to Bill Hate, something that we've been talking about for hours now, and I hope that members opposite are listening. I know I've shared in this House my stories, stories of constituents. As a social worker one of the ways that I found most effective to learn something and to maybe change someone's point of view on something was to hear someone's story. When you have people that are stepping up and are showing bravery, being able to meet them in a place of acceptance, just to simply listen to what they're sharing and to honour the strength that comes from that story is something that I take very seriously. I would hope that all members in this House take it very seriously when we have the privilege of listening to constituents, to Albertans who are sharing their stories with us, that we show them respect, and that we show them a little bit of gratitude in sharing their story.

I've been speaking with a constituent and someone that I call a friend about this bill. I'd asked him if I could share his story and if it could be something that wasn't in my words, because I would have an interpretation or a perception of his story, and if he would be open to allowing me to give voice to his story in the Legislature. It's something that I feel very honoured to be able to do this afternoon, Mr. Chair.

I would like to share the story of my friend Cody. He starts off by saying:

Feel free to use my name if you'd like. I've talked about a lot of this publicly before and want to share it for kids in similar situations to see.

I knew I was gay from a very young age, and for a lot of my childhood it was a very scary feeling. No one around me was like me, and I didn't know how to express that I was different. Without anyone else being gay that I knew, I came to the conclusion, at 12 years old, that I was not normal. That I had done something wrong or was having inappropriate feelings that I should be ashamed of.

I would wait until everyone else in my family was out of the house as a kid, turn on the TV and watch *Will and Grace*, making sure to sit close to the television so I could lunge for the change channel button if someone came home, like it was wrong for me to watch it. I loved that show because they were people like me and that's how I learned what being gay was like. Because you didn't learn about it in school. Because when I put my anonymous question about gay relationships into the bucket in sex ed class to be answered, the teacher pulled it out, said it was an inappropriate question, and threw it away without addressing it.

When I was younger, I would deliberately burn and freeze myself in the shower as punishment for having "gay thoughts". I

didn't know what else to do because I didn't have anywhere to go to express these feelings. It's easy to say I could have talked to a parent or therapist about it, but when you are a scared child who thinks he's not feeling the way he's supposed to and that he's done something wrong, you can't. You can't face that humiliation and you don't want your parents to be disappointed in you.

My high school gay-straight alliance is what saved my life. Being gay is something you can hide, so it is almost impossible to seek out other gay people to talk to about the hurt and the pain that we feel as youth, thinking we're not normal or worthy of love. Having a GSA made it possible to connect with other kids questioning their identities, and it was one of the first times I felt known and accepted in my life. I didn't feel like it was a dark secret or a shameful thing I had to hide and feel bad about.

2:30 p.m.

I came out to my classmates in September of Grade 10, but I wasn't ready to talk to my family about it yet. Not because I thought they were bad people, but because I didn't want to let them down. Having a space to go without my mom being told about it was the point of going. Can you imagine if I went to a GSA to figure out how to best come out to my mom, and the school told her first? Without me knowing they did? Your mom only gets that moment of honesty and truth once, and you deprived the child from being able to do it themselves? My mom is one of my best friends now, and one of the most supportive allies I have, but I needed [the] GSA to be able to come out to her in a way that was best for our relationship. She promised not to tell my dad when I told her, and she kept that promise. A relationship between spouses is one of the most powerful and enduring things on the planet, and even then my mom agreed that some secrets need to be kept, for a period of time. Why [couldn't] a school recognize that, and keep that secret for the health of a child being able to come out in their own way?

I can't imagine not having had a space like a GSA in my high school growing up. It's harder still to imagine being that student that has the courage to ask for one when one doesn't exist already. I was lucky; my school already had a GSA I could join. Not every school has that. And even if it's just for two children, having that space affirms their existence. It tells them that they [really] matter and what they're experiencing is real. That being gay is not a shameful secret to punish yourself for. That every student has a right to ask about their lives and every school has a responsibility to help them achieve self-love and acceptance. Having a GSA denied when a student has put their vulnerable life in the hands of the school is unconscionable. Lawmakers have a moral responsibility to make sure that schools have to support their students, and make them feel like their lives matter, that their identity is worth a club at school.

No child should have to go through the pain I did, but many still do. I'm glad I had a place to be myself and learn that I was loved, valued, and worth just as much as anyone else. I don't know if I [could] have survived if I didn't.

[Signed] Cody

Mr. Chair, I will table it.

**The Acting Chair:** Has that letter already been read into the record once? It was very, very . . .

**Ms Goehring:** It was partially read into the record once.

**The Acting Chair:** Oh. Thank you very much for that.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you. I had run out of time.

**The Acting Chair:** Please table at the appropriate time.

**Ms Goehring:** I will, absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms Goehring:** Hearing the words of a student who says that the GSA saved their life I hope is something that all members in this House are hearing; the importance of having GSAs. Bill Hate fractures what our government had established under Bill 24. We took legislation that had already existed under Bill 10 and enhanced it to support students and teachers to make sure that they truly had a safe place. We wanted to ensure that there was policy in place for anybody that was receiving public funding, Mr. Chair, that we knew that they could show that they would not only have a GSA but that they were safe in doing so, that those students would not be outed.

We heard in the words of Cody that it was his choice when he chose to talk to his family about it, and through the GSA he was able to find the language that he needed to be able to come out to his mom. I think it's really important to really understand the impact of the words he said, that his mom only got that opportunity once to be told about her son, and to have that taken away from the child is heartbreaking. It could be damaging, Mr. Chair. We know that LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk of homelessness, a higher risk of suicide, and to know that legislation is being brought forward that would take away the school's need to support a GSA is just wrong. It's 2019, and I simply can't understand how in this Legislature we're here talking about having to protect something that's already in place because the government wants to strip it of its teeth. It wants to take away some of the legislation that we've already put forward, because we know that GSAs save lives.

We know that the wording that we have used in Bill 24 needed to be strengthened from what Bill 10 had read because Bill 10 was a shell of a piece of legislation that really had no accountability on the school to actually implement a GSA when asked, and that's simply unacceptable, Mr. Chair. When we look at what government is proposing and the pleas that we're hearing from Albertans, people don't want the legislation to change. They're afraid of what's going to happen if this should pass. We're pleading on behalf of so many that have come to us to not go through with this, to leave it as it is. It's effective. It's working.

We've heard story after story from concerned people all across the province, not just members of the LGBTQ community but allies. We've heard from teachers, Mr. Chair, who have said that it is not in their job description to out children. In a school where perhaps one teacher is supporting the GSA, and this student has identified that this teacher could be an ally, a grown-up that this student could trust with their story, could trust with asking bravely for a GSA, this teacher is someone that is worthy of trust. This teacher might face barriers bringing it to the administration in this school and not have this child's wishes be supported. While the one adult is saying, "Absolutely, I support you. I see you. I value you," that might be where it stops.

There is no expectation, with the way that this bill is written, that there ever be a GSA implemented within a school. I think that that's something that's absolutely devastating to know, that a child or a youth has come forward and asked for this, asked for a safe place in their school, somewhere where they spend the majority of their time, and perhaps feels similar to the way Cody did, alone, not knowing that there were other youth that were feeling the same way as him, maybe feeling shameful. But to show bravery in coming forward and asking for help, having a grown-up say, "Yes. Absolutely, I will help you," and then have it being stopped at the administration level without a timeline in place for when this child can expect to have a GSA established is not okay, Mr. Chair.

We as people in this room that are making legislation, the intention should be to move forward with it, to make it better. Despite what we've heard a few members of government speaking

to this bill say, that it is the most inclusive piece of legislation, Albertans are saying: absolutely not. We're listening to that, Mr. Chair. We're hearing their pleas to leave it alone: "Don't interfere with this because it would make it worse. It would make it unsafe for our children and for our youth." I don't understand why a government would choose to do that knowing the importance of having a GSA in a school, hearing the pleas from so many right here on our Legislature steps pleading with government to leave the GSAs alone. I don't understand how in good conscience you can sit, hearing all of this, these personal stories, and still want to proceed with Bill 8 the way that it's written.

I know that I've been standing in this Chamber fighting for the rights of people. I know that I have engaged with a GSA that's in my community and I've enjoyed it, Mr. Chair. I've talked about having some wonderful conversations with these youth who feel safe, who feel supported, who have, fortunately, a school that is incredible at making sure that they have a safe place to gather. They're not about outing kids to their parents. They want to provide the safest place possible for these youth to come and express themselves and ask questions and learn things that have an impact on them.

2:40 p.m.

I spoke in the House about bringing the former MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park as a keynote speaker to come and talk to the youth, to share their story about what it was like growing up in the LGBTQ community and at that point being someone who is an elected official in the province, one of our very first openly LGBTQ elected officials. Seeing someone that they can look up to as a role model is essential, I think.

On this side of the House we are standing up for communities, for kids, for families, for teachers who are asking for Bill Hate to not proceed the way that it's written. Mr. Chair, we've brought forward amendments that are reasonable, amendments that would enhance what's being presented. It's not going to fix it by any means. It's scary how it's being presented and how it's going to proceed, but I think if all members in this House would hear what not only our voices are saying but our voices on behalf of so many constituents, so many Albertans, there is an opportunity to make this better. It cannot proceed the way that it is. It's, quite simply, wrong, knowing that GSAs save lives, and we're hearing directly from people that they don't want this, that it's dangerous to have this, that it's going backwards.

I've talked about the legislation as it was in Bill 10 and then when we brought forward Bill 24 to enhance the legislation. We know, if we look around Canada and some of the other jurisdictions and what they're doing to support GSAs within their provinces, that Nova Scotia has been leading Canada with GSA protections. Not only are the legal protections in Nova Scotia now stronger, but they've recently announced \$750,000 in funding to expand GSA supports to rural areas. Not only are they supportive of GSAs but they're listening to their province say: we need more. Instead of going backwards and taking away rights and making it more difficult for a GSA to be established, they're actually funding GSAs so that they can have the supports that maybe an urban centre would have. They're providing funding and supports to rural areas.

I just don't understand how this UCP government can hear what other provinces are doing and still want to go backwards. They're not wanting to progress this, which is what we were elected to do, to go forward and to take information, to look at studies, to take first-hand experience of Albertans and those that are open to sharing it around the world and move forward to make progress on something rather than strip away what's already in place. Nova Scotia gets it. It's concerning that we're here today talking about

this. The UCP clearly, by looking at this legislation, isn't listening to what Albertans are asking for, what Canadians are asking for.

In March 2017 the Premier told the *Calgary Herald* editorial board that he believes that parents should be told if their children join a GSA. We heard so many stories about the negative impacts of a child being outed to their families without the child's consent. Not all families are going to react in a negative way. I have a very dear friend of mine who was very nervous to come out to her family, playing worst-case scenario about what could happen, and as an adult found the courage to come out and was accepted.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 8? I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. No?

**Ms Sweet:** Edmonton-Manning.

**The Acting Chair:** There you go. Sorry.

**Ms Sweet:** It's okay. We look the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's, I guess, an opportunity now to speak to Bill 8 and have some comments put on the record. I stand, obviously, against this bill. I just wanted to maybe tell a little bit of the history of my family and my journey and about a mistake that I made in my life a few years ago.

As some of the members in this House are aware and for the new members, my family is from southern Alberta, the Pincher Creek area, and I grew up in a very strong Baptist family. My grandparents helped build the Baptist church in Pincher Creek. They ran the Baptist summer camp in Crowsnest Pass. On my uncle's side, their homestead currently has the Mennonite church on their land. So I've spent many amounts of time either in the Baptist church or in the Mennonite church, depending on who decided where we were going to service that day.

Because of that, I've had many conversations with my family growing up, with my grandparents and my dad's side of the family, about our faith and about the teachings that I was taught growing up around being a strong Christian and, you know, living to the teachings that I had and being a good, strong Christian person, I guess. So I understand the conversation that's happening around this bill, around both sides of the argument. Obviously, in my family I'm a little bit of an outlier when it comes to sort of where I've moved in my life, still believing that I'm a Christian person in that I believe in my Baptist upbringing but also having lots of lived experience through my professional life and through my personal life that has influenced how I live my life within my faith.

In saying that, I became a social worker when I was in my early 20s, did my first practicum at HIV Edmonton, where I was working with the LGBTQ-plus community, working in, obviously, a harm reduction philosophy but also coming from a place of coming from a very small town. When I moved to Edmonton when I was 16, it was, like, my first experience with multiculturalism, my first experience really meeting anybody within the queer community, of course, coming from a very strong Christian faith, not maybe being exposed to some of the things that I've been exposed to as I journeyed through my professional life, to the point where even when I was at HIV Edmonton, I think they sometimes would put me in awkward situations just to help me expand my views and learn how to communicate and, you know, talk about and work with the LGBTQ community.

When I became a social worker, I started working with high-risk youth later in my career, for about five years before I was elected, and my primary focus was working with youth. The youth that I worked with were straight youth, gang affiliated, sexual

exploitation, and were struggling in their lives with variants of dynamics and living in a world that I never had to experience growing up.

2:50 p.m.

Now, there was one youth that I met, that I was called to meet with by a school in Sherwood Park. It was a young 15-year-old youth who was doing really well in school, was on the track to be extremely successful, a straight-A student, but the school had started to notice that he wasn't frequently attending as often. When he was there, he was probably in the same clothes he'd been in for a few days in a row. His grades were starting to drop. His attention span was definitely not where it was before. His engagement in his classes and his extracurricular activities was starting to slip. They called and they said, you know, "Will you come out and speak to this youth?" I went to the school to meet with him, and he wasn't there. I was, like: "Okay. Well, when he shows up, give me a call. I'll come out, and we'll chat. We'll find out what's going on." He still wasn't there. A couple of weeks went by; he still wasn't there.

At that time I was still, obviously, working with the other youth on my caseload. There was a particular group home that I worked with that was amazing. This group home had the hardest kids that were in Edmonton that were under the care of Children's Services. It was very unique in how they worked with youth. It was open to different experiences and, like, trying to just engage and develop relationships with these kids. I just happened to be there one day working with one of my youth, and this young man was there. The staff pulled me aside and said: "You know, this youth keeps hanging around the group home. Like, we're not going to send him away, but he doesn't have a file with Children's Services, so we're not really able to have him stay overnight, but he just keeps hanging out here. Do you want to talk to him?" I said: "Okay. Sure." Of course, I went and sat down with him and started to talk to him about, like, what's going on.

It was the same youth that the school had called me for from Sherwood Park. What had happened is that he had stopped going to school in Sherwood Park and had started hanging out in Edmonton. The reason he had done that was because his parents – his mom had remarried and had a new husband, a new relationship, and they were building a new family. He was gay, and although his mother knew, her new husband didn't approve. There became tensions in the relationship between his mother and the husband, and at one point his mother said: "You can't stay here anymore. You have to leave. I am trying to build my family. My husband is not happy with this situation. You're fighting all the time. It's not okay. You have to find somewhere else to go."

Of course, he had nowhere else to go. There was nobody at the school at that point that he felt comfortable enough to be able to have this conversation with. He didn't have a peer support system that he could talk to. He came into the inner city. What happened with that is that this bright, resilient, amazing young man stopped going to school, stopped engaging in all of his extracurricular activities, and started hanging out with the kids on my caseload that were gang affiliated and involved in drugs and involved in a dynamic of other aspects.

Of course, the problem that came with that was that by the time I met him, he was already connected to that community. He was already connected with those youth. He was from a very well off family in Sherwood Park and had entered into a world that he had a very limited skill base for, if you want to call it that. He was continuously victimized by the community because he didn't know how to manoeuvre living in the inner city and how to manoeuvre gangs and how to manoeuvre, you know, people trying to pressure him into using drugs and people trying to pressure him into selling

drugs and all of those dynamics. His life fell apart very, very, very quickly because of that. I mean, I continued to work with him. Unfortunately, by the time I was no longer working with him, his life had changed significantly, and he was no longer on the path to being a really successful adult.

There is concern with that. I mean, this isn't just about looking at youth and saying that, well, you know, this could potentially – like, this can cause harm in so many different ways. But, also, without these supports in schools for kids like this young adult, this young man – if he'd had someone to talk to when he got kicked out of this house, if he had someone in a community in Sherwood Park versus having to come into the inner city, he may not have become a youth that had a worker like me. He may have still had a worker with Children's Services, but maybe that worker would have been working with him in Sherwood Park, where he wouldn't have been exposed to the same dynamic that he ended up being exposed to and then having to work with me, because the cases that I had were extreme.

The other piece of this, too, is that I wasn't prepared as a worker. I'll be honest about that. This is where I say that, you know, I made mistakes in my career, for sure, working with the youth that I worked with.

I worked with these amazing sisters. We called them amazing. They were amazingly great at driving me nuts. They were two young girls who were 15 and 16. They weren't very far apart. They were born into a family that was gang affiliated, that had generational issues. Every uncle, every aunt, every family member was affiliated with this particular gang, and that's what they grew up with. They grew up with constant chaos, constant domestic violence, exposure to drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, all the things that come with the gang affiliation.

By the time that I started working with them – I mean, they were 15 and 16 – they'd lived a good majority of their lives in this context. As a Children's Services worker I tried to do interventions: you know, looking at different placement options, different group homes, family members, kinship care, all of the dynamics that we try to do to keep youth away from those dynamics. They were very good at leaving those . . .

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** Point of order noted.

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise on a point of order under 23(b)(i). While I appreciate the sensitivities of gang violence and gang activity in our province, I don't see the relevance of that with this discussion and would ask that maybe the member get to the point.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much, Deputy Whip.  
Anybody else wish to speak to it?

**Ms Sweet:** Oh, please rule on that.

**The Acting Chair:** Please rule on that. Okay. Well, I did see the relevance of the discussion as it was going forward as to dealing with GSAs in the schools, so I will allow the member to continue. But as we go forward, please try and stay on the bill at hand.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Ms Sweet:** Oh, it blows my mind. Okay. Wow. So let me go back to the two girls I was talking about. They were living with lots of

dynamics, really great at running away from placements. When they were on my caseload, the eldest, who was 16 at the time, was hanging out with a particular girl. I'd see them often together, and I would spend a lot of time with both of them. This goes back to my humility and my mistake in my career that I was referencing not even a few minutes ago, in the fact that I had worked with her for a long time, for years, and recognized her resiliency and recognized that she had a lot of dynamics going on in her life.

3:00 p.m.

But one of the proudest moments that I had was the fact that every time she ran away, I still could find her, and she would still call me, until the day that she told me that she was gay. I didn't know how to respond to that. I had grown up in a household where, when we talked about the LGBT community, it was uncomfortable. It wasn't a conversation that due to my faith, due to my background we talked about. I wasn't trained within Children's Services around how you talk about same-sex relationships. I knew how to, in my career, talk about safe sex, but I didn't know how to engage in a conversation with this youth around her relationship with this other girl. And I'd spent lots of time with both of them.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

So she disengaged from me for a while. She stopped talking to me because my reaction, in hindsight, was probably not the best reaction that I could have given her. And it wasn't because I thought there was anything wrong with it, but I knew in that moment that when I talked to her about it, I shamed her. I created shame in her because I was unprepared for the conversation. I think that that's what's important about this conversation around Bill 8. It's that as adults, when we put ourselves in situations or we are put in situations – I guess that would be a better framing – and we become uncomfortable with the conversation, we project our being uncomfortable onto the people that are making us uncomfortable, similar to the point of order.

I think that when we talk about these things and when we look at the fact that Bill 8 talks about having safe spaces in schools and the fact that we need to create those spaces so that when children and youth want to be able to come forward, when they're prepared to have these conversations, there are adults that are prepared to receive them – there is nothing worse than thinking you have a relationship with a youth or a child or whatever and having them come and talk to you and you not being prepared to be able to have that conversation.

I was fortunate, because I'd already had a relationship with this youth for a while, that she eventually was able to come back and meet with me, and we were able to talk about it. I was able to admit that I made a mistake. I was able to acknowledge that my experiences in my life and the way that I had grown up had impacted my ability to respond to her the way that I should have. That was huge for me. That was a significant learning experience in how I work with the LGBTQ-plus community, how I learned to communicate around these issues and to acknowledge that at that time in my life I was uncomfortable.

Now, knowing that and knowing how important these conversations are and knowing that youth need them, that they need safe spaces and safe adults to have those conversations with, that, to me, is extremely important. Had I not had that relationship with that particular youth, had I not been able to work with the youth that I referenced prior to that, who had been kicked out of his house because of the new relationships, I don't know what the outcome would have been.

So when we look at Bill 8 and we look at the fact that these spaces need to exist and that they need to exist in every school no matter

what school it is – like, let's be clear. I grew up in a faith-based family. I grew up as a Baptist. I grew up not having these conversations, therefore not being prepared as an adult to have those conversations with youth that I worked with. There are people within my faith that are part of the LGBT community. I know that. The church that I go to knows that.

There should not be a distinction, in my opinion, that removes a requirement to create these spaces for any individual no matter what the education, no matter what the system is, no matter if it's a faith-based education system or whether it's a public education system. The reality of it is that people from the LGBT community are in our communities. They are in every single one of our communities, and until we acknowledge that and until we're able to say that to ourselves, we have to be prepared to have these conversations, and we have to know how to talk about them so that we are not hurting the people around us, so that we're not hurting kids.

I mean, that's just fundamental teaching that we have. We take care of each other. I grew up believing that I love my neighbours no matter who they are. I also believe – and I'm totally open to having this conversation with the Minister of Children's Services . . .

**The Chair:** Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 8? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and continue debate on Bill 8. I will do my best to meet the exacting standards of the Member for Cardston-Siksika in debating this bill. I appreciate his close attention to what we have to say.

As we've been proceeding with this debate, I've had the opportunity to share many different perspectives. I will say, Madam Chair, as I've said previously, that though I no longer consider myself a person of faith, I have always greatly appreciated the opportunity to learn from many different faith traditions. Indeed, the different mythologies, parables, proverbs that inform different spiritual belief systems can be very insightful. They can offer some very valuable metaphors and ways to consider different challenges that we face in the complexities of the human condition.

I was really pleased to be able to have the chance to reach out to and receive some correspondence from a rabbi with Temple Beth Ora, the Rabbi Gila Caine, who I had the chance to meet last year for the first time through the Edmonton Jewish Pride Shabbat. She was there again this year. I believe some government members had the opportunity to meet her. The Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, and the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain all had the opportunity to attend that event, of which Rabbi Caine was a part.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity I had to reach out to the rabbi and some thoughts that she has provided on the debate that we are having here today on the changes that this government is choosing to make to protections for LGBTQ2S-plus youth and their ability to form and participate safely in a GSA or a QSA. She begins by quoting from a recent article in the *Star* in which an individual says, "I like to believe that most parents in the province are supportive . . . but if Bill 24 saves the life of even one child, then it's done its job." Here's what the rabbi has to say.

My belief system knows on a deep spiritual level that most parents love their children, care for them and want them to grow and be healthy, happy and strong (and well fed . . .). My culture and spiritual world also demands that our children respect their parents and elders. This is the law. As a mother, a daughter, a rabbi – these are rules and customs which hold my life together.

But Jewish law, like any other legal system, is complex and understands that nothing can ever be straightforward. When

approaching the question of Gay-Straight alliances/Queer-Straight alliances in schools here in our province, I know we must delve deeper than just the basic guidelines of our religious law. This is an extremely complicated question, and what lies at its roots are not only issues of identity but also of belonging. It touches the exact point which asks, how much do we know about what's going on in our children's lives, souls, spirits? How much should they be allowed to hide from us? I think this also touches the painful question of how much each of us is an individual and in what way are we still connected to our root family and tribe/culture?

As I said, this is a serious conversation which should be allowed to unfold within respectful borders, but I would like to bring in one Jewish perspective that sees the urgency in creating these safe spaces for youth.

**3:10 p.m.**

In order to understand why we should encourage the existence of GSAs as a sacred space, I'm going to bring in the category of *Pikuach nefesh* (saving a life.) *Pikuach nefesh* is a Halachic category which states that in almost all situations when we encounter a person in danger of death – our obligation to help them, overrides any other religious law. For example, Jews are not allowed to light [a] fire on Shabbat (the Sabbath), but if by lighting a fire I would save the life of a person who is about to die of cold – then I'm commanded to do that. There are a few instances where this law doesn't work (In cases of Idolatry, incest or murder), but the general rule is that Life comes before anything else. Moreover, for millennia Jews have read this verse "You shall keep My laws and My rules, by the pursuit of which man shall live: I am Adonai" (Leviticus 18:5) and understood it in the following way: These rules given to us by our God, are so that we live according to them.

They are not to be followed if they bring with them death.

I also want to point out that the word "Nefesh" means Spirit – and so, we understand *Pikuach nefesh* to be relevant in questions of emotional and spiritual, and not only physical danger.

And so, we go back to the question of allowing a safe space for young people to explore and talk about their identity and ask the question through the lens of *Pikuach nefesh*:

If a child's life is in danger following their parents' discovery of their membership in a GSA, are we still allowed to inform the parent? And even if we don't know, but only suspect? What then? Halachah would say that we should not tell them, [because] we are dealing here in *Dinei Nefeshot* (the rules of life and death), and in these cases we always are on the side of caution.

Our schools are second homes for our children, and within their bounds they form crucially important relationships and experience physical, emotional and spiritual health. It is the place where they have the right and obligation to explore and grow beyond the boundaries of our own homes. We all hope they continue to feel connected and rooted within our family homes, but school is where they can visit other ideas. [Most] importantly, school at its best is where they can feel free to visit themselves.

Thank God that today Alberta is a place where the variety of gender identities is normalized, and which acknowledges the fluidity of gendered expressions within people's bodies and lives.

I understand this [may] be difficult for some people, and I respect that we all want our children to follow in our footsteps and within our belief system.

But if the conversation is currently at a point where some children and young people are scared for their lives (be it their physical or emotional life), then it is our obligation as a community to create safety for them.

Rabbi Gila Caine, July 4, 2019, Edmonton AB.

I really appreciate these thoughts from the rabbi. This concept of *pikuach nefesh* – the idea that the highest good overrides any other

belief that I might personally have, the greater good of that child, the safety of their physical person, their emotional, their spiritual health – comes first, before any individual or institutional religious belief.

That is the principle that basically lies at the heart of what we chose to do with Bill 24, recognizing the importance of allowing parents to have a particular religious belief, to communicate that religious belief within their home, to choose to send their children to a school where there are others who may share that religious belief but not at any point to allow the expression of that belief within a publicly funded institution to have a negative effect on the physical, emotional, mental health of those youth. That, Madam Chair, I think, is a reasonable compromise despite what 28 schools within the province of Alberta might feel on that point.

It is clear that there are people of faith who understand this principle. Indeed, that is what we saw as a government. There were many schools that operate from a place of religious belief, from a faith-based perspective, who were able to work within what are reasonable expectations, that you do not have explicit policies in place at your school which would tell youth that they themselves, for who they are and who they know themselves to be, for who they love, are wrong. There is a place for an individual to hold that belief. There is a place even for them, perhaps, to have that discussion in some philosophical context, to choose to live their life personally by that belief but not to make that a tenet of a public institution that is there to serve those youth.

The health of the youth, of the child, their safety, their ability to be in a safe and caring space comes first. Unfortunately, with this bill that we have today, it demonstrates that this Premier and, at his behest, it seems, members of this government are not willing to have the courage to take that step. Now, I understand that members of this government may feel that they are doing enough, that it is enough to have the basic tenets in place, that they believe enough in the goodwill of the institutions that we're talking about here that they can remove specific requirements and it will have no detriment to the youth that are involved. But as I have laid out, Madam Chair, and as my colleagues have continued to lay out, we know from experience and from fact that that is not the case. It just simply isn't.

We have, I think, goodwill through the majority of the system. As I said, the majority of schools within the Edmonton public school system, within the Edmonton Catholic system, actually within the Catholic school boards across the province and public school boards across the province, had no problem at all ensuring that those policies were in place and that they took those appropriate steps. Even a lot of the private schools, be they Christian, be they Muslim, charter schools, had no problem at all. It is a minority that have resisted at this point, but the fact is that that minority exists, and we have seen that they are willing to act in a discriminatory manner. They are willing to put their beliefs before the needs of the youth. They are not following the principle of *pikuach nefesh*. They're elevating their personal religious belief, that feeling that they need to hold that particular standard, that they have to draw that line in the sand, above the physical, emotional, and mental health of vulnerable young people within our province.

As I said, there are a number of faith communities that understand this principle and indeed are speaking out against this bill and in support of the principle of *pikuach nefesh*. I have a letter from the Reverend Karen Bridges, the minister of Robertson-Wesley United Church, which is within my constituency of Edmonton-City Centre. She writes to say:

My name is Rev. Karen Bridges and I am the minister at Robertson-Wesley United Church... [which] is an Affirming church which means we are a part of a network of primarily United Church ministries that declare themselves to be fully

inclusive of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

As a faith community we advocate for the oppressed. We seek to provide a safe place for people to be, a space of support, belonging, acceptance, welcome and inclusion. We have a long history of living out the social gospel which compels Christians to reach out to the vulnerable; to provide hospitality when asked and needed; to be the Good Samaritan who helps the person who has been left on the side of the road with nothing. It is in that Spirit that we write to the government.

3:20 p.m.

We believe that GSAs are a vital and essential support system for the LGBTQ2S+ community. Youth should not be required to [have to] advocate for their right to start a support group, nor should they fear that this information would be given out without their consent. As a faith community, we firmly believe that youth have the same rights as adults in choosing to share their personal story and their identity with whomever they are comfortable with and in their own time. If teachers are required to “out” a student to their parents about joining a GSA, or if a principal has the right to decide whether or not to allow a GSA to be formed, we believe it would put many students lives at risk. The potential for self-harm, and mental health issues would continue to grow within this population. I have been a youth minister for over 20 years, and have worked with many students who have [been] bullied, isolated, rejected by friends and parents all because of their gender identity. This has led to depression, anxiety, eating disorders and suicide. It is essential that youth are provided with the resources they need and this includes peer support without the risk of being exposed.

We believe that God created us all equally, regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity. We believe that Jesus calls us to love one another, as we would want to be loved. Unconditional love is about acceptance, and patience, and compassion. Jesus loved the people who were cast out by society. We need to remember that Jesus quoted from the Prophet Isaiah claiming that Jesus was sent “to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free . . .” We hope and pray that the Government of Alberta listens to the voice of the youth from the LGBTQ2S+ community and helps to create a learning environment that starts from a place of unconditional love and acceptance.

Sincerely,

Rev. Karen Bridges

Minister of Congregation and Community Development

Madam Chair, members of this government continue to profess that they believe in these principles, but they are choosing to remove specific provisions that guarantee these things take place. They are choosing to reopen loopholes that will allow, as we have seen in the past, principals, administrators, school boards, others to delay, to block, to prevent, to discourage youth from forming a GSA or QSA at their school, from calling that QSA or GSA the name that they wish to call it, from being able to know that their participation in that club will not be revealed unless they personally choose to reveal it.

It is an intentional decision that this government is making because they believe there needs to be more balance, that somehow allowing these youth the unencumbered opportunity to do this is an unacceptable offence to particular institutions’ beliefs, that the beliefs of those institutions should trump the health and the well-being and, indeed, the free expression of the students who they are there to serve and that they receive public funding to serve. The rabbi and the reverend have made clear their opinions on it, and I have to say that I agree. There is no need to put religious belief, however sincerely held, ahead of the health and safety – physical, emotional, mental, spiritual – of vulnerable young people.

The needs of these individuals who take offence to being required to accommodate these youth do not trump the needs of these youth. They are not greater. They are not more important. This is not an attack on them. This is not some sort of subterfuge or conspiracy by which outside parties are coming in to try to pre-empt or take away their faith. This is not an attack from a shadowy gay agenda. This is about protecting the health and the safety of vulnerable young people, period.

This government is choosing instead to roll that back, to say to these youth: “We will roll the dice, and hopefully you’re not going to run into any problems here. We’re going to take away the guarantees, so hopefully the folks at your school are going to support this. If not, well, we’ll have some ambiguous, unidentified process. Perhaps if you write to the minister, maybe she’ll sit down and have a chat with them – who knows? – because we aren’t going to put down those rules. We’re going to take away, in fact, the clarity that has been there, the clear expectation, because we are afraid of a particular segment of our base.” That is why, Madam Chair, myself and my colleagues will continue to stand in this House and debate this bill, to protect the health and safety of vulnerable young people.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. It’s my pleasure to once again rise and speak about Bill 8. Of course, you know, this side of the House knows the importance of GSAs and the importance of having a specific timeline in terms of when they are brought into force. I know we’re speaking on the main bill now, but an amendment that we put in earlier talked about immediacy, and by that we really mean that in a two-week window the principal would be compelled to create a GSA. If that’s not done, children are at risk, and they need the support.

You know, in the hopes of changing hearts and minds on the government side, I have done a bit of research and have pulled up a study from the *Journal of School Health*, and it was published in June 2017. Several authors – and I’m happy to table this at an appropriate time – have done this research in both Canada and the U.S. It was a North American study. They have various backgrounds. Some of the researchers are school administrators, some are social workers, some are psychologists, so there’s an extensive array of different academic backgrounds who worked on this study. The title of it is LGBTQ Youth’s Views on Gay-Straight Alliances: Building Community, Providing Gateways, and Representing Safety and Support. Their research is pretty clear, and I’m just going to sort of share it with the House here.

We know that

adolescents thrive in climates that foster healthy development; arguably the most important climates are those in school and family settings.

We’ve talked about that before. Certainly, sometimes, you know, a family isn’t a healthy system for kids. If it is, of course that’s the optimum, as is the school environment, and those can vary. Some can be more healthy than others.

While macro-level systems certainly influence societal climate (eg, marriage legislation, media messaging) . . .

sort of these overarching parts of being a society, looking at that through a macro lens, not so much at the specific family or school, which is more of the micro lens,

. . . it is [really, though,] the micro-[lens] of interpersonal and socioenvironmental factors that are the strongest predictors of whether a climate is more protective . . .

We talked about protective factors before.

... or [harmful] for an adolescent. The infrastructure of a school (eg, school policies, [school] programs, staffing ratios) can foster or inhibit a positive ...

environment that may promote a healthy climate.

We know that

gay-straight alliances (GSAs), as a part of a school's climate, are a key strategy designed to ensure safety, support, and respect for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth in schools. Yet little is [really] known about the mechanisms through which GSAs might lead to positive outcomes for [these] youth.

Therefore, this study is really looking at exploring the perceptions and benefits of GSAs through the voices of those young people who are part of them. It's really an exploratory study.

3:30 p.m.

One of the terms or the concepts that the researchers speak about is school climate. They really talk about school climate as being

the essence of school life that "reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures." A positive school [environment] promotes healthy youth development, learning, life satisfaction, civic engagement, feelings of safety ... [feelings of] respect, and student learning and is [correlated] with lower levels of mental health problems ([for example] anxiety, depression, loneliness) and [also] substance use

and abuse.

There are five interrelated sociological dimensions that comprise school climate. Safety is one of them. Relationships is another. Teaching and learning is a third. Institutional environment is a fourth. And the fifth is school improvement processes.

GSAs are [an] integral [part] to promoting a positive school climate for LGBTQ youth. More broadly, research indicates that "creating a supportive environment for [these] students improves educational outcomes for all students ..."

And, of course, we have talked about that extensively, how not only questioning students but others, heterosexual students, also benefit from the creation of a GSA.

Thus, it is essential to consider GSAs as being situated in [a] school climate and as influencing not only LGBTQ youth but ... all youth in [these] settings.

[Gay-straight alliances] are school-based clubs that aim to provide a safe environment for LGBTQ youth and their allies. GSAs are often student-led with a teacher or a school-related adult adviser.

Certainly, that is something that we want to make sure that the legislation does have in it. Not only do we want them to have that two-week window where a principal – it's incumbent on him to create a GSA, but he or she would also assign a staff support to that club.

Fifty per cent of LGBTQ students in the United States have a GSA or related student club available at their school, and two thirds of these students reported participating.

But GSAs are not uniform across all schools although most provide various types of support such as socialization and peer group support. Sometimes they have queer proms, movie nights, Facebook pages, counselling, group sessions with a GSA adviser or school counsellor, and advocacy. Examples of that are classroom presentations or a day of silence.

A growing body of predominantly quantitative research demonstrates that GSAs are an important resource for LGBTQ youth. The relationship between a GSA and school climate is complementary and mutually informative; for example, GSAs in schools where students perceive greater hostility regarding sexual orientation engage in more advocacy efforts in schools with less hostility. LGBTQ youth who attend a school with a GSA, in comparison to those without a GSA, report safer school

climates, more supportive teachers and school staff, better grades, and a lower likelihood of skipping school because of fear. GSAs most certainly impact and intersect with all the aforementioned school climate dimensions, either directly or indirectly, and warrant further investigations as a key contributor to [a] positive school climate.

[Also,] GSAs have been found to reduce mental health and substance abuse issues, including suicide, depression, alcohol use, and smoking. Importantly, GSAs have also been associated with students having an increased sense of safety and [a] lower likelihood of harassment experiences.

One researcher, Russell, and his colleagues noted:

GSAs can provide feelings of empowerment for young people as well, in the form of combating sexism and heterosexism and community/safe space formation. Other studies show that LGBTQ youth who report participating in a GSA have fewer problems related to bullying and anti-LGBTQ victimization.

A study by Toomey

found that LGBQ young adults who attended a school with a GSA were more likely to obtain a college education. [Additionally], GSAs are associated with ... lower odds of discrimination because of actual or perceived sexual orientation ... suicidal thoughts and attempts among [LGBTQ] youth, and also for heterosexual boys ...

So reductions in those.

... and reduced odds of recent binge drinking for LGB girls, and unexpectedly, also for heterosexual boys and girls.

This study, really, besides sort of gathering the literature to this point, does ask a question.

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the varied experiences of LGBTQ youth involved in GSAs, and, specifically, the functions they perceive that GSAs serve in their lives.

When these groups were actually formed, what is it that was the really mitigating factors that actually created a more healthy school climate that supported students to do so well?

Participants for this study were recruited from Canada and the United States, as I said previously, and they were between the ages of 14 and 19. Of course, they were invited to participate, and the methodology used: as I said, it was an explorative study, you know, quantitative research. It was an open-ended interview. There were six open-ended questions that the researchers used, and each interview was audio recorded and transcribed so they could look in detail at it, look at the coding and all of that. Some of the results that came out of this qualitative study – I think I said "quantitative" before; it's qualitative. My apologies. The youth described multiple facets of GSAs, which were organized into three main themes. You know, they did the coding of all the interviews, and these were the three themes that emerged from that data.

The first one is that GSAs provide and build community, the second one is that GSAs serve as gateways, and the third is that GSAs represent safety. I'll go into some detail about what exactly these three themes actually mean.

The most prevalent theme that emerged from youth's comments about GSAs was that GSAs provide a readily accessible community, with community-oriented benefits that largely coalesced around 3 aspects of community as defined by McMillan and George.

The three aspects of community are:

Community members share an emotional connection and social support ... communities provide a sense of membership, and ... communities fulfill needs of the members.

Sharing [that] emotional connection provides a foundation for membership in the GSA community and the support received from this community. Youth described the benefits of a GSA community in facilitating connection [in] common experiences.

This is a quote from one of the youths that was interviewed.

You have something in common . . . you might go through some hardships in life and it's just nice to be around people that you can express your problems with.

Another student shared:

You think maybe they won't be [your] type of people. Maybe I won't fit in with them. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if they look like the type of people you'd hang out with or not. They're gay and you have something in common and you have that going for you.

That was another young student.

3:40 p.m.

One participant highlighted the appeal of having this GSA community after learning about a GSA from a student speaking in their class, so the student was telling them about this GSA that was available. It was a male. He says:

"I was pretty excited to join, and I noticed that the other kids didn't really care. It didn't really affect them, but for me it affected me a lot because I wanted to meet others like me. I wanted to meet others that would support me or that were supportive of this community."

Membership in [a] GSA conveys for many youth that someone is friendly and/or is someone with whom a youth has something in common, even if they did not appear to be upon first impression. Once membership in the GSA was known, impressions can change, as 1 youth shared: "We have people I would see from a distance in the cafeteria who I would think don't seem too friendly but then see at GSA and think, oh, I guess they are friendly."

It opened up avenues of connection.

Youth talked about the GSA not only as a source of emotional connection, but also as a source of personal support.

This is a quote again from one of the research subjects, one of the students.

"I like that they'll talk about problems and they'll try to help you. As like a community, basically, which I find . . . cool" . . . The same participant illustrated the importance of a sense of shared emotional connection by describing when he felt that emotional connection does not exist with [the] straight group leader: "She doesn't really have a connection to it. I think it's pointless that she [runs] it [the GSA]" . . . Other youth reflected broader appreciation for all involved in the GSA, as shared by this young male: "There's nobody in there that's going to say anything against me or anyone else there. And everybody in there is absolutely for sure accepting of the LGBTQA+ community, like, all those people. So I guess that's kind of [why] I feel at home."

This was from a 14-year-old gay male.

The youth's sense of membership in [this] GSA community was apparent in a number of ways. Many talked about membership in the GSA community as providing an open, comfortable space, and feeling, for some, like a family. For example, [one of the] youth said: "Everyone is just really understanding . . . always open arms for anyone who wants to come in. So, it's just really [a] kind [of] open [and a cool] space" . . . A recently graduated participant reflected: "We really just hung out and just talked and laughed and danced. It was a family, definitely" . . . For many, the social benefits of membership reached outside [of] the bounds of the GSA meetings; participants talked about hanging out with the same group outside of the school environment.

For some, a sense of membership in the GSA community was fostered by being invited to the GSA by existing friends; for others, the direction was reversed: "It was kind of tricky to find people that I would relate to, and then I joined [a] GSA, and I found my friend group."

That was a 14-year-old gal.

Membership in the GSA community caused youth not to feel isolated in their identity: "It was nice to know that there were other people like that, because I would never have suspected that [anybody] else was."

This speaks so loudly of the isolation many in the community feel and how transformative it is to have a GSA.

A few participants said they did not attend (or delayed attending) because they did not know anyone or did not like the people in the group.

Finally, youth membership in the GSA community was demonstrated by youths' expressions of personal investment. For many, personal investment was shown by taking on leadership or co-leadership roles in the GSA or GSA activities. It was also demonstrated in participation, as 1 youth expressed frustration at missing a planning meeting: "I forgot to go, and I'm, like, no I needed to go to that."

So they felt a lot of affinity to being part of that important group. Also,

the youth in [the] study highlighted ways the GSA community fulfills the needs of members within the group itself and outside of the GSA in the broader school community. Within the group, the GSA community can fulfill . . . educational, advocacy, and other personal needs of . . . group members. Youth highlighted their own education within the group, sometimes learning from each other and sometimes learning . . . from outside resources.

Here's a quote.

There's some kind of doctor who specializes in gender, so we're Skyping with him on Monday because we have a couple of students in our GSA who are like, "I don't know my gender," and they want to put a label on it, so we're going to Skype with him and see if he can help that and explain to people who don't understand the genders. Even me, I think I've got a better grasp on it.

That was helpful to those students. They got the connections and the understanding of a way they can get some clarity on some pretty confusing times.

A few youth highlighted the role of the GSA in helping members come out to [their] parents.

This is a quote.

My friend, she wanted to come out as bi, but she had no idea how to do it. . . . She came to [the] GSA, she asked a couple questions and [then] the week later she was out to both her parents.

This provided some support to this young 14-year-old, who then was able to express to her own family and had a positive result.

The GSA community also works to fulfill the shared needs of group members in the broader setting.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, we have a number of guests joining us in the gallery today.

We'd just like to acknowledge your presence here and that you are welcome in the Alberta Legislative Assembly. We are on Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, in Committee of the Whole.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is rising to speak.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and welcome to the guests. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. I will begin my comments by making a confession to this Chamber. I am a policy wonk. I am someone who loves the technical details and who loves to get into issues, which has caused great stress for various advisers that I've had in my time as an MLA when we want to keep things high-level – "Let's hit the key messages; you have to say it until you're sick of it, and then other people will hear it," that type of thing – and I'm, like, "Let's talk the details."

But in today's Bill 8 debate we have the opportunity to talk about some of those details, so I'm really delighted to stand to talk about

Bill 8 and why I do not support it, the concerns I have with it, and to be a bit of a policy wonk and to bring in some of the supporting facts for why, because that's what I really love, so I appreciate the opportunity to do that.

To quickly summarize Bill 8 and why I do not support this bill, this Education Amendment Act is being brought in in a way that essentially removes protections that were implemented by our government, through Bill 24, for gay-straight alliances, student-led groups supported by teachers, created when a student requests them and often used to create a supportive environment. I'm going to speak in a little bit more length about why I support gay-straight alliances, supported by the facts and some of the policy details.

The biggest concerns I have with Bill 8 are that this introduction of Bill 8 is going to do a few things. It's going to exempt private schools from having gay-straight alliances, which I think is really a shame for the students who attend those private schools.

When a student requests a gay-straight alliance in their school, right now the legislation says that school administration needs to respond to that request immediately, but Bill 8 is going to take that away. This is damaging because we know from many first-hand student experiences that when they ask to start a student-led support group in their school, barriers and roadblocks were put in their way and delay tactics were used. The removal of that immediacy is a strong concern to me because justice delayed is justice denied. A GSA delayed is a GSA that those kids don't have. I have strong concerns about that.

As well, this bill removes employment protections for teachers who may be LGBTQ2S community members. The idea that we are removing those protections is shameful to me.

*3:50 p.m.*

I also disagree with the removal of some of the enforcement mechanisms by which the government can make sure that all schools are following the legislation and, when a student requests it, creating that GSA.

Fundamentally, I believe that LGBTQ2S rights are human rights, that all Albertans should be treated with respect, and that all Albertans should be afforded the opportunity to come out to friends, to family, to their community only at their choosing and when they are ready.

I base a lot of my support for GSAs on the amazing discussion and debate that my colleagues have put forward. Kudos to my colleagues with all of the personal stories, information, support from validators that they're bringing into this discussion. I really feel like we're getting a lot of value out of being able to explore these issues in depth, and I genuinely hope that the government members who are listening are hearing what I'm hearing, which are some compelling reasons not to support Bill 8; alternatively, compelling reasons to support some of the amendments that are going to be coming forward, that we've had the opportunity to kind of preview will be coming.

Now, getting back to my policy wonk terminology, in seeking to present as compelling an argument as possible for this Chamber and for any Albertan tuning in, interested in learning more about this, I have been seeking out some of the research as to why GSAs may be important, because I don't think there was a GSA when I went to high school. It was many years ago, Madam Chair. I will refrain from telling you when. My age is on Wikipedia if anyone is curious. But I don't think I had a GSA back in the day. In fact, I really felt a lot of what the Member for Edmonton-Manning was saying in that talking about these issues was not something that I was immediately comfortable with. This was something that, as I grew as a person and learned more about the LGBTQ2S community and learned

more about how to support friends and family, I grew a little bit more comfortable with.

In seeking out more information and more research, I have found some really good resources from an organization called GLSEN. Now, they are U.S. based, but we know there are lots of similarities between things happening in the U.S. and in Canada. This group was founded in 1990. It started off as just some teachers in Massachusetts who came together to improve the education system. In over 25 years that small group has now turned into a leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe and affirming schools for LGBTQ students. The interesting thing about them is that they conduct extensive original research to inform evidence-based solutions for K to 12 education.

As you can imagine, Madam Chair, their research touches on GSAs in many ways, and I think a lot of what they've got to say we can bring into this debate and really think about the benefits, the pros and cons, of gay-straight alliances. The first thing I'd like to quote from is GLSEN's research brief titled *Gay-straight Alliances: Creating Safer Schools for LGBT Students and Their Allies*. It begins by saying:

Schools are responsible for providing a safe learning environment for all students. However, for many students, especially students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), school is not a safe place. There is compelling evidence that the majority of students frequently hear homophobic remarks and other types of biased language at school, and that LGBT students experience bullying and harassment at school because of their sexual orientation and/or their gender expression. These experiences contribute to a hostile climate and some LGBT students choose to miss school in order to avoid negative experiences that threaten their safety.

Findings from a growing body of research demonstrate the positive impact that school-based resources, such as clubs that address LGBT student issues (commonly known as Gay-Straight Alliances) may have on school climate. [These] are student-led, school-based clubs open to all members of the student body regardless of sexual orientation. [They] often advocate for improved school climate, educate the larger school community about LGBT issues, and support LGBT students and their allies. This brief examines the current research on GSAs and highlights major findings regarding school safety, access to education, academic achievement for . . . students, and access to GSAs in schools.

Then there are just a few major findings. I'm going to pick and choose a few of the more interesting tidbits from this piece. The first major finding is "The presence of GSAs may help make schools safer for LGBT students by sending a message that biased language and harassment will not be tolerated." I have to tell you, Madam Chair, that from my own conversations in my home community of Edmonton-Mill Woods, when I talk to people around Alberta, and when I listen to colleagues in this Chamber, I know this to be true, that the presence of GSAs helps schools feel safer for LGBT students.

What the research brief goes on to say is:

Biased language, such as racist, sexist, and homophobic remarks, can make school a hostile place for all members of a school community. Homophobic remarks . . . used in a derogatory manner, are among the most frequently heard types of biased remarks . . .

Again, these are U.S. schools.

Students in schools with GSAs are less likely to hear homophobic remarks in school on a daily basis than students in schools without . . .

by a significant margin. The entire school environment is changed by the presence of a supportive school club for students to gather in.

GSA's are related to greater physical safety for LGBT students. LGBT students who attend schools with a GSA are less likely than those at schools without a GSA to report feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation . . . or because of the way . . . they express their gender.

Safety is measurably improved when there is a GSA.

Educators believe in the value of GSA's – more than half . . . of secondary school teachers nationally believe that having a GSA would help to create safer schools for LGBT students.

Major finding 2 from this research brief says:

Having a GSA may also make school more accessible to LGBT students by contributing to a more positive school environment.

LGBT students in schools with GSA's are less likely to miss school because they feel unsafe compared to other students: a quarter . . . of students in schools with GSA's missed school in the past month because they felt unsafe compared to a third . . . of students at schools without GSA's.

Here we see measurably that attendance is improved, which I think is a really important part of school because if students are not in school, then they are not learning, they're not growing towards becoming successful, productive adults.

Students in schools with GSA's or similar student clubs are two times more likely than students without such clubs to say they hear teachers at their school make supportive or positive remarks about lesbian and gay people . . .

Again, the idea that a GSA is helping the entire school community in creating that more positive environment.

Major Finding 3. GSA's may help LGBT students to identify supportive school staff, which has been shown to have a positive impact on their academic achievement and experiences in schools.

Students in schools with a GSA are more likely to report that school faculty, staff and administrators are supportive of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students . . .

LGBT students in schools with a GSA are significantly more likely than students in schools without a GSA to be aware of a supportive adult at school . . .

This makes sense because, of course, there would at the very least be a teacher assigned to be the co-ordinator, the person supervising that GSA. Right there a student can find out that information and know that there is a safe and supportive school administrator or teacher and, even if a student didn't want to go to the GSA meetings, could seek out that teacher to get support, advice. I think this is so important.

LGBT students in schools with a GSA have a greater sense of belonging to their school community than students without a GSA.

They have a greater sense of belonging to the community because, of course, the community feels more welcoming to them.

I mean, it all follows, and it makes, for me, these kinds of stats – I'm not reading all of the percentages but more the high-level findings. It really reinforces to me the importance of GSA's and why I am so strongly objecting to Bill 8, which weakens those protections, will make it harder for GSA's to form in many cases, no longer requires support for them in private schools, and removes protections for LGBTQ2S teachers.

Now:

Major Finding 4. Most students lack access to GSA's or other student clubs that provide support and address issues specific to LGBT students and their allies.

In a national survey of secondary school students, less than one quarter . . . of all LGBT and non-LGBT students report that their school has a GSA or another type of student club that addresses LGBT students' issues.

Although LGBT students may be more likely to be aware of a GSA's existence than other students, less than half of LGBT students . . . report that their school has a GSA.

4:00 p.m.

Now, we also find, as we see in so many issues, that there are often intersectionality issues when we're looking at this. The report goes on to say:

Some LGBT students of color may have less access to a GSA at their school than their peers.

I think that's something we need to keep in mind, that the experience of all students is different based on their backgrounds and based on who they are.

LGBT students in the South and in small towns or rural areas are least likely to have a GSA in their school.

Knowing that

Schools are often not a safe place for students, particularly those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. GSA's can help to make schools safer for students and may play a role in mitigating the negative impacts of bullying and harassment experienced by some LGBT students. LGBT students in schools with GSA's are less likely to hear biased language . . . homophobic remarks . . . less likely to feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression, and . . . less likely to miss days of school because they are afraid to go. In addition, [they] may play an important role in helping students identify staff who may be supportive and to whom they can report any incidents of victimization.

I have some additional data, that I will talk to maybe later, now or later, later, that talks about how low the reporting rate is when an LGBT student is victimized. I think that's a really important factor.

The presence of a GSA may offer evidence of a school's commitment to LGBT students and their allies, creating a source of perceived support for students even if they're not actively engaged with the GSA themselves.

Just having a GSA in the school changes in positive ways the school community. It's supportive to students who identify as members of the LGBTQ2S community but also helps to build more tolerance and accepting attitudes in all students as well as staff. We start to see that through the data, through the stats, being policy wonks and looking at kind of the background.

How can we apply these positive impacts of GSA's to our debate on Bill 8? Well, I think that by acknowledging that the changes in Bill 24 to protect students, to make sure that when they request a GSA, it gets formed, to make sure that teachers who are members of the LGBTQ2S community cannot be fired and have that very explicit protection – all of those changes in Bill 24 were done for very reasoned purposes, supporting students and making measurable, positive impacts in Alberta students' lives, because these are students who will become more likely to graduate. These are students who will become more likely to be successful as they grow and learn. Having Bill 24 respond directly to feedback that we were hearing from Albertans was something that I strongly supported.

Now, I would note that there were 23 MLAs who voted against Bill 24, and many of those MLAs who voted against Bill 24 are now members of the new government caucus. The introduction of Bill 8 is essentially a way to remove Bill 24, to weaken those protections for gay-straight alliances. It's turning back the clock on the protections for those LGBTQ2S youth.

I really want to be very clear that supporting students and seeking the best possible outcomes for all Alberta students should be fundamental for any government. We see through the statistics that having a GSA benefits not only the students who are members but the entire school community, that having a GSA improves the outcomes for students. It improves their likelihood of success. It also improves attendance and all of those factors that buy into that, and by supporting students through GSA's, we know we're

supporting human rights and building that better Alberta future that we are looking for.

I would also note that when we were debating Bill 24, all those pieces that are going away because of Bill 8, the ATA strongly supported the work that was done in Bill 24. The ATA, who represents teachers and knows far better than I what teachers do and do not need, said that they wanted that clarity. Having that support, I thought, was incredibly significant during that debate, and I would like to remind all members of this House of that now, as we're talking about Bill 8.

I have heard members of this House speak in support of GSAs. That is always appreciated, but Bill 8 needs to be amended to return the immediacy, to undo the exemption for private schools. I would like to see employment protections for the teachers, but I understand that the government has already defeated that proposed amendment, which is incredibly unfortunate.

Through the debate on Bill 8 I want to say how much I've appreciated hearing the stories, the letters brought in, the very unique perspectives, like those from leaders in our religious communities – thank you to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for sharing some of those stories – because what I'm hearing is a story that, layer upon layer, talks about the need to support our students, talks about the need to make sure that when students are requesting a school club to create a supportive environment for themselves and their peers, that need can be met quickly, that they can be supported for the betterment of not only the kids who go and attend the GSA but the entire school community and, ideally, the greater outside-of-school community as well. These are all important steps.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, any other members wishing to speak to Bill 8? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Once again it's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak against Bill 8. I was so humbled to learn and listen to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and to listen to the experience of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the very personal experience of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. All of these stories: what they tell us is that life is, you know, a learning process; also, how those small things – not understanding, not having experience, not having been exposed to it, not having been raised by those values – can put someone's life really in danger.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

As I mentioned in previously speaking to this bill, you know, I belong to a very conservative family with conservative values. I do not have a personal experience. I do not belong directly to an LGBTQ2S community; neither does any member of my family or friends belong to the LGBTQ2S-plus community. But in talking about GSAs/QSAs, this is something that we can expect, one of the best behaviours of humankind, and we cannot expect anything less in the society if we are committed to make this world better for all, where everyone can live their life with dignity and, not only that, can have access to build, learn, and grow respectfully. I think that whenever we are talking about GSAs, when we're talking about QSAs, that is kind of the behaviour that these clubs are trying to build, trying to establish.

4:10 p.m.

Instead of encouraging them, instead of praising them, instead of helping them, instead of providing security for them, this bill really, really attacks them and – how would I say it? – weakens even their

existence. As legislators I think this is our responsibility. This is the place where people can expect that their representative can listen to them and come together, sit together, and discuss forming policies that can, you know, promote their fundamental rights. But looking into this bill, the argument and some of the proposals in this bill being discussed are really, really threatening the aspect of security that was provided by the GSAs/QSAs in schools.

I have an article I would like to refer to. This is how people can be affected without legitimate – by the lack of a policy, I would say. The reason I just wanted to refer to this article is because the proposals in this bill are lax in the schools' not having a specific policy regarding GSAs/QSAs. It is also lax in the rules, that the principals of the schools will not be bound to act in a timely manner if a student or students request to form a GSA or QSA. By moving forward this way, this bill would situate the students in very tricky situations, where they will be, you know, exposed and they will be bullied. Further, this bill already allows that those students can be outed, so whole lives can be jeopardized in the lack of legitimate policy providing the protection, the fundamental rights of the LGBTQ2S-plus community.

I'm just trying to refer to this article that was published in the journal called *Edutopia*, edited by Emelina Minero. The article heading says Schools Struggle to Support LGBTQ Students. This directly relates to what we are trying to discuss, that the schools will have a lack of policy, how they are going to address, how the government is going to deal with those schools that will not have policies, how this government will deal with the funding regarding those schools that will not have the policies in place. This article actually shares the story of Roddy Biggs. The article was published on April 19, 2018, last year. It says:

Pinning Roddy Biggs against a locker, a student whaled on him, giving him a black eye, fracturing his eye socket, and bruising his ribs. It wasn't a lone incident for Biggs, who came out as gay to his Tennessee high school when he was a freshman.

"I didn't really do the best in school because of it," recalls Biggs, now 23 . . .

Last year he was 23.

. . . who says homophobic slurs, death threats, and shoves were commonplace. "I had depression and panic attacks and all that stuff along the way."

Biggs can still remember the teachers who ignored the bullying or simply said, "That's not cool," and walked away. But there were also the educators who tried to help, like the science teacher who took him to the principal's office after he was beaten and sat with him for more than an hour during class time. Oftentimes, though, the best efforts of teachers were stymied by district or state regulations that stopped them from doing much more.

These are the practical examples, the real examples of the lack of a legitimate policy supporting the vulnerable member of the community or the community at large and the kind of, you know, danger that they can go through.

The article says further:

"Most of the educators wanted to help, but did not know how or were limited in what they could do," says Biggs, referring to Tennessee's lack of legislation preventing the bullying of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) students. Tennessee is one of 32 states [in the U.S.] that do not have such protections in place.

That's what we are really, really worrying about, then, on this side of the House, my colleagues for a number of weeks discussing this bill, bringing up all those articles, arguments, listening to our constituents in the ridings, listening to the LGBT community, looking at the LGBTQ kids. You know, two weeks before, the LGBTQ community, especially the students, came out hugely

during very rainy weather. That was a hope for them. That was a hope for us, those kinds of requests, I would say, the callings that will ensure that the members of government look into this seriously and put their attention to once again and see what can be done and what we can change in this bill.

But looking at the experience of the last two weeks, I would even say the last two days, even the numerous amendments to the bill did not really convince anyone on the government side to, you know, set aside or sit together and say: let's see if even one of those amendments can help strengthen the legislation or if they can help strengthen the protection. The government House has always claimed that they stand for protecting the LGBT community; not only protecting, but they always say that this is the province, they claim, where they're providing one of the best protections in Canadian jurisdictions, but then, in fact, when we are, you know, outlining some of those clauses, those are really weakening the GSAs, QSAs in schools.

4:20 p.m.

They are basically expunging the rights they have right now provided by the guidelines, the timelines that the legislation provides. This bill will eliminate those things. It in no way supports the government's claim that this is the best protection for the LGBTQ community that they're committed to provide in a Canadian jurisdiction.

Referring to the article, I would say that, clearly, this article outlines that with a lack of policy, even the people who were willing, even the people who were generous, even the people who wanted to be there, they could not because there were no procedures in place, there was no training. You know, the Member for Edmonton-Manning really shared her personal experience. There were no procedures in place. The people did not know what to do in that situation.

Given all those arguments, I will say the facts, but it seems like nothing is moving forward. The members on the other side are really convinced to move the way that they believe in, not really, you know, what the facts are telling but what they really believe in. They also claimed during the election that this is not something that they're looking into or that they are moving forward with. They were not looking to legislate social policies: how the people live, what the people believe in, what their faith is, what their religion is, or what their sexual orientation is. In this case, it seems like they're not walking their talk.

I just wanted to refer to the article, this very heart-wrenching article, full of the evidence of what happened to this young person. The researcher surveyed nearly 2,500 teachers and students across the country and found that teachers were less comfortable intervening with bullying due to sexual orientation and gender identity than with bullying based on race, ability, and religion. That is why it's very important to legislate a policy, so the schools can have guidelines, timelines, and the teachers can have training. You know, ethically we need to encourage all those people, so I would say that most wise people – that's what we can expect from, I would say, a prudent person in a given situation: to stand up for their friends, stand up for the vulnerable, the people who are suffering.

But the bill at hand right now, three or four proposals in this bill are really an attack on the legislation that already provides protections to the LGBTQ community. This article says:

And while 83 percent of educators felt that they should provide a safe environment for their LGBTQ students – by displaying visible symbols of support or disciplining students for using homophobic language, for example – only half had taken action to do so, according to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education

Network (GLSEN) . . . an organization that helps K-12 schools create safe environments for LGBTQ students . . .

. . . Some teachers reported feeling uncomfortable talking to their students about sexuality due to their beliefs or perceptions about what's appropriate – often conflating sexual orientation with sex – while others felt pressure from administrators or parents to keep tight-lipped. And a lack of professional development on how to address LGBTQ issues and bullying has left teachers ill-equipped to establish LGBTQ-inclusive cultures or to identify anti-LGBTQ behaviour and harassment. Meanwhile, the emergence of highly politicized issues like . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Members, anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 8 on the main bill? The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise again today to speak to Bill 8, what we're hearing in the community as Bill Hate. I just want to note that I will be making reference to some correspondence, and, as per your direction, I will wait until an appropriate time to table the correspondence.

**The Acting Chair:** If I could, Member, just a reminder that the tabling can only take place during the next daily Routine, which will all depend on how far we progress.

**Ms Goehring:** Right. Or an alternative is an intersessional tabling. I do have the tablings. I just wanted you to know as the chair. Thank you.

Parts of my discussions so far on the debate have been making reference to people that have reached out to me to express concern over this legislation moving forward, Mr. Chair. I can say that people are watching right now as this debate is occurring, and people are continuing to send in e-mails and correspondence, reaching out, expressing concern over Bill 8 and what it outlines. I've shared stories throughout this debate, not just today but in past days of debate regarding this bill, that are troubling and are concerning.

What we're talking about in this piece of legislation that's being introduced is people and specifically LGBTQ community members, staff in schools that have expressed concern over and over about making any sort of amendments to this that would take it backwards, Mr. Chair. That's exactly what this piece of legislation is proposing to do. I could see if they were looking at enhancing it, making it better, like I'd talked about earlier about Nova Scotia putting a dollar amount to support GSAs across their province in rural communities. That, to me, would make sense. That is not what this piece of legislation is proposing to do.

I've expressed stories from constituents who lived in rural Alberta as children who are transgender and who struggled, who disclosed that they have practised self-harm and had said that if perhaps a GSA had been available to them in their youth, they would've been safe. They would've been able to accept who they are at an earlier phase in life and perhaps not had such a horrible experience in adolescence.

4:30 p.m.

We know that as adolescents we struggle. Being a young person is not easy. We have hormones. We have peer pressure. We have so many things impacting us in so many different ways. When you put onto that pressure a system that doesn't support them asking for a GSA, it doesn't make sense to me, Mr. Chair. Knowing that a student is asking for help, asking for support in the simplest of ways, by establishing a GSA, to me simply makes sense. It says from the adults in the school, it says to the peers that are in the school that their opinion matters and that they're valued and that they're loved and that they're supported and that they have a safe

place within their school where they can come together and discuss current topics, have questions identified in a safe and caring and nurturing way.

We heard from a constituent who had tried to reach out in their classroom by asking a simple question in a sex ed class. I know that as a student I had the experience of being given an opportunity to put a question in an anonymous box. Students could put those questions in the box, and then the teacher would read them and then answer the questions to the best of their ability. This gave students an opportunity to maybe ask something that they were a little bit embarrassed about. Well, today we heard the experience of a gay student who had asked a question and was told in front of the class that not only was it inappropriate but that they simply wouldn't be responding. So what message does that give to that young person? Well, that their questions aren't important, that this is something that they should perhaps be ashamed about because it didn't even warrant an answer. A GSA would provide an opportunity to ask those questions in that safe place, in an anonymous setting, where the child can identify with their peers and with some grown-ups that are there to support them through their questions.

As a mom I hope my children have supports in place, that if it's not me that they feel that they can come to, there are other grown-ups that are healthy in their life that they can ask those tough questions of that they might be too embarrassed to ask me as their mom or their dad or their older siblings. To me, I've always seen the school as that place for my children. It's somewhere that I entrust my children to go to every day during the school year for multiple hours a day. I'm trusting these adults to help my child. I know that situations come up outside of the curriculum that we trust these professionals to talk to our students about. As a mom it's important to me that my child feels safe in that school environment.

When we look at what Bill Hate is proposing to do, it clearly creates a space that is not safe for all students. To me, I just don't understand what the motivation or the intention of moving forward with that is, Mr. Chair, especially when we've heard so many stories, so many pleas to not proceed with the legislation as it is in this way.

This afternoon during this debate I received another e-mail from a constituent. It says:

Hi Nicole,

I want to send my concerns over the UCP's introduction of Bill 8. As a parent I am ashamed that the UCP would introduce a bill that could endanger the well being of any child. GSAs are an important peer group that can be life saving during adolescence, which is difficult as it is. Outing a child to their parents could be detrimental and cause significant harm; for example, review the rates of teenage homelessness and an alarming percentage of those teens identify as gay, bisexual or transgender. These kids are homeless because their parents kicked them out because of their sexual orientation. I want the UCP to explain to me how this protects the kids since the party is so "pro life". The right for children to form peer groups is enshrined in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms (hopefully, since you form my provincial government, I won't have to explain that to you).

My daughter has expressed concerns over GSA's, and Bill 8 has added to the anxiety that kids are feeling. The concerns expressed by my daughter are ones of fear that her friends will be "outed" and get in trouble from their parents. With a GSA, if you don't like it then look away as so many members of the UCP look away from poverty, intellectualism, democratic rights and equality of condition for the voting population.

In closing, I want to quote the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child for you to ponder upon before you try to ram Bill 8 down Albertans' throats:

"The Right to be heard and participate in decisions that affect them – every child will have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them."

Consider the UN declaration as a guiding document, as something an evolved democratic society should aspire to.

Sincerely,

TK

I think, Mr. Chair, that this is not an opinion that isn't common that we've been hearing. I can only assume that members of government have had these letters and these e-mails and these meeting requests from concerned Albertans, from members of the LGBTQ community, from teachers, from parents. I'm curious. How many have taken the time to sit down with their local GSA and talk to the kids about what that experience is like for them and talk to the teachers who are supporting them and who are there every day making sure that they are creating a safe, inclusive environment for the students that they are there to work with?

I would hope that when being asked for some sort of change with this bill, members of government are listening. I've heard it said that hope is important, but action is essential. We can sit and hope for good intentions, for good actions to come forward, but actions, Mr. Chair, speak much louder than words. So far what we've seen through this piece of legislation is that the actions of this government are to push it through despite the pleas from Albertans, despite hearing these heart-wrenching stories of self-harm, of suicidal ideation, of homelessness. It's very concerning to me why you would want to proceed with this legislation knowing the impacts.

We've heard references to several studies about high rates of suicide and self-harm and homelessness in the LGBTQ community, especially with youth, and still there is no acknowledgement that a GSA could reduce that. We've heard first-hand testimony of students who have started GSAs, who participate in GSAs, who have peers that perhaps aren't from the LGBTQ community themselves but are allies, like the daughter of the constituent's letter I just read, who is concerned for her friends. As a child she is expressing concern for her friends who she knows are at risk if this legislation goes through the way it is, Mr. Chair.

We know that the way to build a better society is being truly inclusive and listening to the concerns and the needs that have been brought forward over and over and over again from Albertans. I attended several of the pride events here in Edmonton during pride. Having those one-on-one conversations about the life-changing, life-saving impacts of a GSA is incredible, and the fear that is being expressed about what this legislation proposes is real. There is a definite concern from not just the LGBTQ-plus community but people from all across the province, worried about the impacts that this is going to have.

I just fail to understand how you can move forward with this legislation knowing all of this information and feeling good about the outcome of it. There have been claims that this is the most comprehensive legislation. We're hearing from Albertans that they like it the way it is, that it would be rolling backwards to implement what is being proposed here, and that just doesn't make sense to me, Mr. Chair, when we're looking at ways to improve our province and to make life better for our youth and our children and our teachers.

4:40 p.m.

We've heard from several members talking about the teachers' experiences. Some of them lost their jobs over being someone who identifies as gay and a fear of being outed amongst their peers because they know that they could lose their job. When you have a culture in the system that already exists, why would you want to

make it worse? Why would you want to introduce legislation at this point that is going to take some situations that are not great and make them worse across the province? That just doesn't seem to make sense to me, Mr. Chair.

I know we had proposed some amendments, and I'm sure that there are more to come. I would really hope that members opposite, before the time comes to vote on this piece of legislation, really listen to not just what we're saying but what we're saying on behalf of so many who've reached out to us to ask for their voice to be shared in this Chamber. I know that I take great pride in being able to represent Edmonton-Castle Downs, and I know that when constituents reach out and express concerns and questions, I can say that I shared those with the government, that I spoke to that, that I asked the questions that you're asking. I just hope that that's having an impact on what the decision is going to be when it comes time to vote for this or when it comes time to look at some of the other amendments that could be coming forward, and not just oppose them because they're coming from this side of the House.

We've talked about some of the history in this Legislature of different parties coming together to work through on what makes sense and what is truly in the best interest of legislation, and it can't be that everything that we have proposed, with research and with support from Albertans, is dismissed simply because it came from our side of the House. I would hope that that's not the case, and I would hope that we would hear from members opposite about their reasoning for why they're not supporting some of the information that's being provided and how they can dispute some of this data that is so glaringly clear. It just doesn't make sense. I haven't heard so far, Mr. Chair, anything that is in support of moving forward without considering the life-saving impact that a GSA has.

I know there's talk about students still being able to ask for a GSA, and that's something that we've heard over and over from members opposite. Sure, they absolutely can ask. When someone is courageous enough and brave enough to come forward to actually ask for a GSA, there's no timeline specified in this piece of legislation as to when that would occur. It could sit on that administrator's desk indefinitely. Now, we're not asking for it to be done immediately. But we know that having one established is at the request of a student and will have a positive impact, Mr. Chair.

It's going to not only impact the life of that child that is supporting it but perhaps the peers of that child that weren't brave enough to come forward to ask for it, so those children are going to benefit from having a GSA as well. We know that seeing that in your school gives the impression and gives messaging to students that they're cared for, that they're supported, whether or not they choose to go to the GSA. Not all kids feel comfortable enough to even do that once one is established, but knowing that it's there is so important. Knowing that they could access it if they wanted to is amazing when it comes to the self-esteem of our children.

Just having that safety mechanism in place in a school is going to change the lives of kids even if they don't access it. Knowing that it's important to the school: it sends a message, just like a message is sent when a child asks for it and it doesn't happen. That message is: you don't matter; your needs aren't important. Those are devastating messages to be giving to youth, especially in a time when they're asking for support.

We've heard members talk in the House about some of the activities that happen in a GSA and about some of the sinister beliefs that are being spread about what happens in a GSA. From first-hand experience it's a place where youth come together and they laugh and they talk about kind of pop culture and what's happening, and they have an opportunity to ask some of those tough questions that they might be struggling with, that they don't feel comfortable asking outside of that safe space.

As a mom, as a social worker I know how important it is for our children to feel connected and to feel like they matter and that they are valued. Having an adult that's helping with that makes it that much more important. Knowing that there's supervision that's happening and guidance that's happening in that space: it makes an impact. Knowing that they can do so freely, without... [Ms Goehring's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member.

Other members wishing to speak to Bill 8? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and continue on the intensive debate on Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. I'd like to start by moving to a slightly different topic for a moment, another aspect of Bill 8, that being the trustee code of conduct and recall process. Some of my other colleagues have already spoken to this, but I wanted to offer a few thoughts.

Now, as others have noted earlier, we've certainly seen some situations previously where we've had some challenges with school boards in the province of Alberta. Notably, folks have referenced the drama – there really isn't another word for it – that we had with the Edmonton Catholic school board here for a period, interestingly also involving in a number of situations LGBTQ2S-plus students and their request for accommodation within that system. But, that aside, we saw there what can happen when we have a very dysfunctional board. Indeed, I recognize that that can be a challenging situation and one that can be a real impediment to getting good things done on behalf of students and teachers and the other people that the school board is intended to serve and support and to be able to make some very important decisions for.

I can think of other occasions. I remember that for a while there was some controversy that came up around a school board trustee in Ontario – I believe it was in the Toronto region – who made some, frankly, extremely racist remarks. There was a good deal of pressure that was brought to bear by the community around feeling that, given that that school board trustee was not willing to resign or to apologize or step down having made those remarks – there was a lot of pressure from the folks in the public that the board find some way to remove that individual. To the best of my recollection, they were not able to do so. They did not have that power.

I can appreciate where this comes from in that respect, and I think it's reasonable that we would have some code of conduct in place. I think that makes sense. That should be true for all public officials. There should be expectations in place about the integrity with which we carry out our work. Given that we're entrusted with large sums of money and make significant decisions that can have real impact on the people that we represent, it makes sense that there be some expectations around that.

**4:50 p.m.**

Now, how those expectations are enforced can become another question. I could see how giving a board the ability to vote by a majority to remove a particular member – a duly elected individual, mind you – could cause some very chaotic circumstances. For example, as we referenced, with the difficulties that the Edmonton Catholic school board went through for a time, I can only imagine how that might have been exacerbated, how that could have been made so much worse if there had been the sort of jockeying that we'd see on, say, *Game of Thrones*, with people forming alliances and this person standing against that person and this group against that group as people fought to try to remove each other from that board.

I don't know, Mr. Chair, if you've ever been part of a condo board. That's another circumstance, and indeed, you know, within a condo board there is the ability, if you have a majority of unit factors, to actually then vote members off the board. I have certainly, admittedly, participated in that process and seen some of that drama take place. Again, those are duly elected positions, certainly on a smaller scale and perhaps not always with the same level of participation that we might see in a school board election.

But I think it is problematic in some respects to introduce that here. It's something that, basically, is saying that the majority of the board could choose to override the will of the people that elected that individual. I find that a little bit concerning. I don't feel that this is a piece that has been sort of adequately consulted on with the public, that people fully understand that this was the intent. Certainly, the government, in announcing its intentions to proclaim the Education Act, didn't get into particular details of this, so I don't really buy the argument at this point: well, we said in our election platform we'd proclaim it; therefore, that's okay. This is not something that I think the average Albertan was aware of and necessarily understood. It's something, I think, that could be problematic, and it ties in . . .

**An Hon. Member:** It's similar to the carbon tax.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Now, the Member for Calgary-Klein is mentioning that this is similar to the carbon tax.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Hey, don't put words in my mouth.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Or it was a member to my right. I thought it was the Member for Calgary-Klein. I apologize if it was not.

But there is a member from the government who is saying that this is like the carbon tax. I would say, Mr. Chair, that this legislation was already existent, it was already there, and certainly it was possible for the government to have provided further detail about what it intended to do here.

I'd say that that is somewhat different from having made a commitment at a time when there was no expectation that our party was going to form government. Nobody believed that that was going to be the case. So to assume that our party would have in that circumstance had a secret plan on the off chance that we were going to go from four members to a majority government in the province of Alberta at a time when all of the polling data going into that election suggested that that was a long shot at best is, frankly, laughable and ridiculous. It is a cheap and empty talking point on the part of this government that they like to continue to perpetuate, and they're certainly welcome to do so. If they'd like to heckle it in this House, then I'll respond to it in kind, and I will point out how ridiculous and shallow it is.

Continuing with the debate, recognizing the challenges inherent in bringing in this form of recall for trustees, I would suggest that, like so many other aspects of the Education Act which this government has chosen to set aside in their rush to remove protections for GSAs and LGBTQS-plus students in the province of Alberta, perhaps this would be a piece that they should have considered setting aside for a time, much as they did with most of the other substantial portions of the Education Act, including things like changing the age at which students will no longer receive coverage to continue to attend a public school along with numerous other pieces.

It's part of what I'm seeing this government choosing to do on a number of fronts in terms of increasing the politicization of many systems, whether it's with the Senate Election Act, that we see them bringing in now, which does far more than simply reinstitute the process that was here before – it injects large amounts of money,

large amounts of new partisanship into various political processes within the province of Alberta – or their announcement today of the new Alberta inquisition. Nobody expects the Alberta inquisition, Mr. Chair, though in this case it was promised, so I suppose we did expect it, and we'll see if there is punishment by comfy chair, for any Monty Python fans in the room. It seems to be a particular bent of this government to want to increase the level of politicization of a number of processes in the province of Alberta, and I don't think it's helpful in this case with school boards.

That said, I'd like to return to discussing the substantive portion of what this bill is. As I've noted several times, it's pretty clear why this was done, the intent of introducing this Education Act, given that the large majority of what was actually in place in the act, as has been ably laid out by my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, who worked on the creation of that act, who worked with the hon. David Hancock on that process – the majority of the legacy that was put into that bill has been stripped out, left an empty shell, simply so that the government can replace the changes that we introduced through Bill 24 to the School Act, which were to provide insurance that students would be able to form a QSA or a GSA at their school without interference, without delay, providing the clarity that teachers and others sought as to appropriate conduct in terms of revealing a student's participation in a GSA or a QSA.

This introduction of the Education Act was simply meant to circumvent that and to attempt to remove those things in an attempt to pacify a small segment of Albertans, which this Premier intentionally inflamed, intentionally offered incorrect information about what the intent and focus and purpose of a GSA is, which some members of this government at the time, members of the opposition, also added misinformation to. Having done that, this Premier then wanted to find a way to pacify that section of the base by making these changes but doing it in a way where he would somewhat cowardly hide this from Albertans and try to do it in a surreptitious way.

That brings us to what we have here, this particular bill and this particular change and, in particular, the removal of the requirement to support these in private schools. Now, private schools, of course, Mr. Chair, as you're well aware and as all members of this House are aware, receive public funds. They receive those public funds because they are viewed as doing a public good: they are educating students. That is something that they are doing as a service on behalf of the people of Alberta, so they are provided with a certain percentage of public funds to carry out that work. Members of government have been very vocal in believing that that should continue to be the case.

Certainly, that was our practice as a government. We also believed that that should continue to be the case, and we continued. As we provided stable, predictable funding for school boards across the province of Alberta, that, of course, included private schools. Now, if these schools are indeed being funded by the Alberta public to carry out a public good, I see no reason why they should not be held to the same standards as every other school within the province of Alberta, particularly when it comes to the protection of vulnerable students, the physical, emotional, mental, and indeed spiritual health of these youth.

*5:00 p.m.*

I shared earlier from a letter from Rabbi Gila Caine, where she talked about how within the Judaic tradition they hold that a religious belief is important but that it is something that is set aside when it is a question of life and death, when it is a question of whether it would do damage to another human being, whether that would be physical, mental, or psychological, emotional. I think

that's a respectable and good tradition, and I think it's one that appropriately applies in this circumstance.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

There is no reason any private school in this province needs to be exempt from allowing students, if they so ask, to form a GSA or a QSA. There's no reason they should be exempt from having a clear and accessible safe and caring schools policy. There is no reason they should be exempt from respecting the basic human rights of their students and indeed of teachers. There is, in my view, no religious belief that is so significant that it should be allowed to override those things. There is no need. It does not impact anybody's personal beliefs, their abilities to hold those beliefs, their ability to communicate those beliefs to their children within their home, to be able to celebrate and hold those beliefs in their place of worship or amongst their community. But in a space which is receiving public funds, there is no reason they should not be held to the same expectations, then, as every other educational institution that is receiving public funds.

With that in mind, I have an amendment I would like to move. I'll wait for that to get to you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member.

**Mr. Shepherd:** I'm moving this on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**The Chair:** Okay. This will be amendment A4.

Hon. member, please proceed.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you. Basically, that member is moving that Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be amended in section 8 by striking out the proposed section 30(1.1) and substituting the following:

(1.1) Section 33(1)(d), (2) and (3), and section 35.1 apply to an accredited private school, and a board or a principal referred to in those sections are deemed to include a person responsible for the operation of an accredited private school.

As I said, Madam Chair, there is no reason for any institution which is receiving public funding to carry out a public good and deliver a public service, where the service is for the youth involved, to be allowed to discriminate against those youth in terms of their freedom of expression by the formation of a club, their freedom to gather together with people of like mind within their school, a space which, for them, is often like a second home. There is no reason that the particular beliefs of that institution should hold sway over or be able to trump or be considered more paramount than the safety and well-being of those students as they are able to assess for themselves. We know that there are institutions that have placed blockages in front of students that wished to have this within some of our fully publicly funded systems.

This is a requirement that's in place in our public schools. It's a requirement that's in place in our Catholic schools. It is reasonable that private schools, which are also receiving public funding, would be required to offer the same level of support, respect, and indeed human rights for the students they are there to serve, not students that they are there to tell what they should or should not believe, not students that they are there to tell who they are or are not but students that they are there to guide in education, to support in their own journey of exploration and learning, an opportunity to explore who they are.

I think it's reasonable that we would ask private schools receiving public funding to deliver that public good, to abide by the same rules that are in place for all other educational institutions within the province of Alberta, and I'll be interested to see, if we

have some discussion from government members, if they will offer any reasoning why they feel that should not be the case. I would encourage them to speak to this. I would be open to hearing their views.

This is our opportunity for discussion and debate, and indeed we're holding this floor and holding this space so that all Albertans have the opportunity to understand the government's reasons for the changes that they wish to make and why they wish to remove this provision and why they have chosen not to bring this over from the School Act while they did so many of the other changes that we instituted and updated. If there is a reason other than this Premier's intent to pacify his close friend and ally Mr. John Carpay and others who spread the sorts of misinformation and reprehensible views that we have heard from Mr. Carpay, then I look forward to hearing the Premier or members of this government explain what that reason is.

I look forward to the opportunity to continue in this discussion and this debate. As I noted, I think that in the majority of cases the 28 private schools that have been involved in this have largely been, to my understanding, private religious schools, but we have heard from many faith leaders that there is no need to prevent students from having access to this space for that reason.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this amendment. We on this side of the House certainly believe that it's important for all children to have access to GSAs in a timely manner, and it doesn't matter if they're in a private school or a public school. These GSAs indeed save lives.

The last time I did speak, I was referencing research that did talk about the importance of GSAs and the transformational work that they do to make sure that children are safe and healthy, really. Whether they're in a private school or a public school, as this amendment stipulates, we need to make sure that children always have access.

I'll just say for the record again that I'm referring in my speech to a scholarly journal article published in the *Journal of School Health* in July 2017. The title of the research article is LGBTQ Youth's Views on Gay-Straight Alliances: Building Community, Providing Gateways, and Representing Safety and Support. As I also said previously but will say again, the research involved a PhD psychologist, PhD social workers, and some nurses, so it was sort of a crossacademic paper that looked at many aspects of the benefit of having a GSA in schools.

Of course, the purpose of the research was to study, for a deeper understanding, the varied experience of the LGBTQ community that are involved in GSAs, specifically the functions that they perceive the GSAs serve in their lives. This is qualitative research. Their research subjects were 14- to 19-year-olds who were interviewed in an open-ended interview. They shared what they believed was the benefit of having a GSA in their school, whether it was private or public – I'm not sure their research looked at that – and just an overall understanding of the importance of GSAs for the health and well-being of all students in the community and also the importance for heterosexual students.

**5:10 p.m.**

What the researchers found was that there were three main themes that were identified by these students who were interviewed in their sample. The first theme, and the most dominant, that

emerged from the data from these interviews that they transcribed and coded – if anybody has done qualitative research, you know that that’s quite a rigorous process and that it takes a fair bit of time to help those emerging themes come forward – was that GSAs provide and build community. I’ve already begun some remarks about what that actually means.

The second is that GSAs serve as gateways. I’ll be continuing to talk a little bit more about what that means and why it is so beneficial. Whether you’re in a private school or a public school, GSAs really support people in the community to have some important access to other resources in their community.

The third emergent theme – the first was, of course, building community; the second was about gateways, serving as gateways – is that GSAs represent safety. Students feel safe and indeed are safer. The research does show that schools that have GSAs have a much more inclusive attitude and that all students feel safer. There’s less bullying, less physical violence.

In just finishing up on the first theme, which is, of course, about building community, we know that the GSA community also works to fulfill the shared needs of group members in the broader setting, so not only in that school system, whether it be public or private, but in the broader setting. Those involved in their GSAs mentioned the multifaceted role of the GSA in raising awareness of LGBTQ issues in the school, providing LGBTQ education within the school, and working to address bullying, hosting school events, fighting for gender-neutral space.

A recently graduated participant reflected: “We really just hung out and just talked and laughed and danced. It was a family, definitely” . . . For many, the social benefits of membership reached outside the bounds of the GSA meetings . . .

so beyond the school,

[and] participants talked about hanging out with the same group outside of the school environment.

For some, a sense of membership in the GSA community was fostered by being invited to the GSA by existing friends; for others, the direction was reversed: “It was kind of tricky to find people that I would relate to, and then I joined GSA, and I found my friend group.”

This person felt affinity, connection pretty well immediately when they joined that group. That was from a 14-year-old.

Membership in the GSA community caused youth not to feel isolated in their identity: “It was nice to know that there were other people like that, because I would never have suspected that anyone else was.”

One participant

highlighted the appeal of having this GSA community after learning about the GSA from a student speaking in [their own] class,

and they talked about how excited they were to join.

Membership in GSAs provides so much support and connection for students so that they feel that they belong. We know that belonging is a fundamental part of being human, and if we are not feeling like we belong, that can be extremely difficult for students.

I just want to go on and talk about some of the other challenges that the GSA community felt because they didn’t have a group to feel like they had an affinity with. One participant identified some of the issues their GSA was taking on. They did some advocacy work within their own school by

educating the rest of the school. And making things within the school and the community more queer-friendly. Like, we just got a gender-neutral washroom in our school

because of the advocacy work of this student group.

This young person also talked about planning events to raise awareness. “Once or twice a year we hold events. So, like, we’re planning a trans awareness week right now. Where we’d put like

announcements in the morning saying, here’s a fun fact about trans people” . . . Some of youth who elected to not attend the GSA at their school said they felt the group does not accomplish anything, and mentioned that they belong to other groups that better fulfill . . . needs.

So, again, it wasn’t a panacea, but it had a transformative impact on people who did find affinity within the group.

In summary, GSAs offer an opportunity for LGBTQ youth to be members of a community – an extremely important perceived benefit. Youth voiced this benefit in several ways. They enjoyed sharing an emotional connection and similar perspective with their fellow GSA members, and therefore felt a sense of safety and belonging as part of this group in which they socialized and personally invested. Through this, many individual members had their personal needs fulfilled, and the group as a whole was able to meet their shared needs within the larger school environment through education and advocacy.

Whether it’s a private or public school, certainly these GSAs were extremely beneficial to students.

The second theme that emerged from the data was that GSAs serve as a gateway. What does that mean exactly when we say that GSAs serve as a gateway? In addition to

providing a community in which youth [felt] connected and fulfilled, GSAs . . . serve as a gateway to supportive adults with whom they may not have otherwise connected, community resources . . .

So a gateway to adults, a gateway to community resources.

. . . and the larger LGBTQ community.

Most prevalent in our interviews were the adult relationships that youth described when discussing their GSA experiences, including GSA advisers, teachers, and school administrators. For example, 1 youth responded to a question about available LGBTQ resources not by mentioning specific material objects but rather, an adult, “there’s not a structure that you can visualize when you think of a [resource]. Faces pop into your head, like our GSA adviser.”

This student felt that this adult adviser was able to provide them the information they needed regarding whatever challenges they were facing. So that connection, those healthy connections with adults that were supporting them, was really transformational, and they put this under the theme of a gateway so that they could access even further resources.

Youth from across all 3 study sites discussed the specific types of support and guidance they received from these nonparental, important adults. Several youth spoke about connecting with adults who were members of the LGBTQ community, who then serve as role models and positive examples of being out in the community.

A pretty challenging thing for a young person is that they just really don’t know how to navigate. There’s no mentor for them that’s available, so having access to these adults, who have the same lived experience but, you know, are further down the path, is really transformational for these students in that they can have some help in how to be in the world because it’s all new to them and there are not people with like experience for them. These GSAs really give them access to that.

These adults provide them with the support in their own identity development and discovery of additional LGBTQ-specific resources. For example, 1 youth stated, “She’s . . . the nicest person. She helped me get out of a lot of funks.”

This was referring to the school staff that supported the group. That made a big difference for her.

5:20 p.m.

Still, other youth spoke more generally about the pro-LGBTQ messages they received from adults they connected with through their involvement with the GSA. When speaking about

the process of working with school administrators in getting a gender-neutral bathroom approved, one youth stated:

“They worked together really well . . . they understood the importance of it. And they made it happen and usually there’s a lot more, kind of administrative stuff that needs to happen with it. But they skimmed over that . . .”

That really supported them to get to what they needed to create this gender-neutral bathroom.

Another youth, when explaining the Ally Week that the GSA hosted at school, stated, “. . . all people do is say, ‘Hey, I’m an ally,’ and teachers were [doing] that and that was pretty cool.”

Again, it is really just about having a sense of belonging and understanding and then knowing who is safe in your community. Without these GSAs students don’t have access to that because oftentimes this is hidden and not spoken about. But in private schools, public schools where GSAs exist, then this is available to students.

In terms of this second emergent theme, this gateway that GSAs provide:

In addition to connecting youth to supportive adults, GSAs also serve as a gateway to community resources. Through their involvement with GSAs, youth spoke about discovering services such as health care clinics, hotlines, and support groups: “Because I was so involved in . . . [Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network] and GSA network, that’s how I knew about all these resources.”

Connecting with health care resources via their GSA involvement was mentioned by several youth in this study. The GSA adviser and the coadviser

both led a . . . seminar, and we had health people come in, and they had a whole pamphlet on health providers for LGBTQ people. I actually have that, because I’m uncomfortable with my doctor, so when I’m older I want to choose a different doctor. I’m going to go based off that and people who specialize in that.

This was a 16-year old female.

Another youth spoke poignantly about the importance of GSAs serving as a gateway to community resources, saying:

“My GSA has people who come in and they speak about these places, because a lot of the LGBTQ kids have problems at home, so maybe they’d run away, or problems where they don’t want to go to a clinic where they have to pay . . .”

This was an American study, too, so they could have a fee with their paying health system down there.

. . . and they don’t want to go to a clinic where everything is going to be leaked to their parents, in case they’re not out yet.”

You know, out to their parents and they’re not safe in that community.

Another aspect of the gateway, the emergent theme from the research, is that

GSAs also connect youth with the larger LGBTQ community by providing connections to current policy or advocacy issues, pride events, and other LGBTQ peers. For example, 1 youth said that they . . . share articles on Twitter and Facebook, especially regarding policy initiatives. This youth stated, “During the transgender policy that was trying to be implemented . . . both [Twitter and Facebook] were used hardcore” . . . Another youth stated, “My GSA in my high school, they have flyers about a lot of locations where LGBT youth could hang out” . . . Some community organizations directly reached out to the GSA:

“[A community youth program] came to do outreach for our GSA, so they actually came into our school and did a workshop. So we got a bit of a taste of what it would be like and – yeah, I met the awesome facilitator and got a look into how it would be, and it was an immediate wow, yeah, I’m joining this . . . I’m not too busy to join this. I can make time for this. Probably was too busy for it, but I still went and I’m glad I did.”

These larger resources in the community, especially for the most vulnerable LGBTQ kids, who, you know, may or may not be safe at home, may be kicked out – this GSA gave them that gateway access to community organizations that also provided other services. It could be affordable housing. You know, it could be some supports if they indeed got kicked out.

Through these experiences youth are able to meet other LGBTQ peers and feel part of a larger community. One youth said: “A lot of us actually do hang out at [the LGBTQ youth organization]. We do on our free time try to get into that type of LGBT movement” . . . Another youth, when talking about a float their GSA did for Pride stated: “It’s – I guess it’s a good way to show a sense of community . . . You can meet some really great networking people that way. It’s a lot of fun. I think it’s a good way to celebrate your differences definitely.”

That was a 15-year-old female.

Several youth [also] spoke about meeting LGBTQ peers at GSA regional meetings or conferences.

So beyond just what’s happening at the school. Maybe there could be a regional meeting, you know, a provincial meeting, that kind of thing.

One spoke about the GSA regional meetings that he attends:

Well, in [town], besides me and [my friend] and maybe three other people, I don’t really know anyone that identifies as LGBT. I mean, there are a lot of supporters that we know in our whole friend group, but there’s none that identify, so I guess in a way it’s nice to know that there’s other people.

This fellow came from a smaller community, so when he went to that larger meeting of a sort of regional GSA, he was able to meet with people who, you know, had his lived experience and in that received tremendous support.

In sum, an additional perceived benefit of GSAs is that they act as a gateway to many resources. GSAs assist LGBTQ youth in connecting to supportive adults, such as GSA advisors, teachers, and school administrators. GSAs offer a link to several community resources to meet individual needs outside of the group, such as healthcare clinics, hotlines, and support groups. They also provide youth an avenue in which to relate to the larger LGBTQ community via involvement in LGBTQ events, partnerships with community organizations, and social media news and advocacy postings.

So, again, very significant support for them.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, on amendment A4 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is rising to speak.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I am delighted to rise to speak to Bill 8, amendment A4, I believe. This amendment, I think, is really important and touches on a lot of what the members on this side of the House have been saying across the debate for Bill 8 at all readings. Essentially, this amendment says that private schools should fall under the same rules, should have GSAs when students request them, and, ideally, if other amendments are also accepted, that GSAs should be granted immediately or soon after students request them, and that LGBTQ2S rights are human rights, which are essentially the things that I and my colleagues have been saying.

Now, in order to support this amendment, I am going to reiterate my policy wonk roots because I do want to read into the record why GSAs are so important to Alberta students, be they public, private, or other students in this great province. I am going to, in order to make my case, use another really important report by the organization GLSEN, that I was talking about earlier. They did a 2017 national school climate survey where they actually talked to 23,000 students between the ages of 13 and 21 from all around the United States. I think that it is a representative sample for what high

school and other students in Canada are likely to experience as well, and it really mirrors a lot of what my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview has been talking about as well as other research that I've directly seen.

5:30 p.m.

This was one of the largest sample sizes that I found in looking for good data to back up the discussion that we are having here around Bill 8 and the important necessity for students to be able to form, conduct a GSA, for them to be supported through the administration. I strongly object to private schools being exempted, so I support the amendment that we're currently discussing. I think it's really important that inclusive and supportive school policies continue to be required from both public and private schools. I thank the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who moved this amendment on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

GLSEN, The 2017 National School Climate Survey, really reinforces some of the things we've already heard in this Chamber. I read this into the record and I share this with my colleagues in the Chamber because, again, I worry that in taking party lines on this issue and in going back to base talking points, we're forgetting who we're talking about, which is children, which is students in our province, which is constituents that we go and see at high school graduations. I think that on the surface we may not always realize or acknowledge the challenges that our LGBTQ2S students might be facing because they're not always visible. A lot of this will be internal turmoil or things that are quietly happening in schools that we might not be aware of.

This national survey of 23,000 students helps to give us a bit of a picture as to what life as an LGBTQ2S-plus student may be like. I really want to talk about some of the findings that they found, including the fact that

schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBTQ students, the overwhelming majority of whom routinely hear anti-LGBTQ language and experience victimization and discrimination at school. As a result, many LGBTQ students avoid school activities or miss school entirely.

Specifically around safety, almost 60 per cent of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, 45 per cent because of their gender expression, and 35 per cent because of their gender. That's significant. We're talking about feeling unsafe at school, a place where all students should feel safe. School as a safe place: that is something that I think is very fundamental. If you're somewhere where you do not feel safe, learning is going to be much more of a challenge. If you're feeling hungry, if you aren't fed, if you don't feel safe, if you don't have those basics met, the Maslow hierarchy of needs – my psychology degree is coming back to me – if you don't have the basic needs met, it can be really hard to focus on learning about trigonometry or other important topics.

Thirty-five per cent of LGBTQ students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and 10 per cent missed four or more days in the past month. We know that attendance is a huge predictor of school success. Kids need to be able to attend. If school doesn't feel safe and they're not attending because it doesn't feel safe, school performance can and will suffer, and we've seen that in other studies that we've talked about.

Over 4 in 10 students avoided gender-segregated spaces in school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, for example bathrooms or locker rooms. Most reported avoiding school functions, at 75 per cent, and extracurricular activities because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. Seventy per cent of 23,000 students that took part

in this avoided extracurricular activities because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. That is very, very saddening. As many of us know, when you're in high school, it's a very challenging time for most of us. I'm still uncomfortable about my high school time. Being able to be on sports teams or to have the camaraderie and friendship through different groups and clubs I think is really important, and LGBTQ students in many spaces not feeling supported or safe is harmful.

Now, they also surveyed and asked these 23,000 students about anti-LGBTQ remarks at school, and it probably won't surprise you to know that almost all of them, 98.5 per cent, heard "gay" used in a negative way, like "that's so gay," at school, 70 per cent heard these remarks often or frequently, and 91.8 per cent reported that they felt distressed because of this language. Hearing these types of homophobic remarks or the word "gay" used in a negative way, harmful to LGBTQ students, does not work to create a safe and caring space for them. Ninety-four per cent heard negative remarks about gender expression, like not acting masculine enough or feminine enough, and 62 per cent heard those remarks often or frequently. Eighty-seven per cent of LGBTQ students heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people.

Of course, this is a very, very saddening stat: 56 per cent of these students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff. This brings me back to some of the earlier statistics we were talking about, Madam Chair, where we saw that the number of times students would hear homophobic remarks from students or teachers decreases with the presence of a GSA. I think we're seeing a real picture of the environment that LGBTQ2S-plus students can find themselves in, especially when there isn't a supportive GSA or a supportive culture for these students.

Now, the vast majority of LGBTQ students, 87.3 per cent, experienced harassment or assault based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender expression, gender, religion, actual or perceived race and ethnicity, and actual or perceived disability. Madam Chair, I just want to emphasize that 87 per cent experienced harassment or assaults. This is a normal part of the LGBTQ experience for many of these 23,000 students that were part of this study, and that's horrifying.

The fortunate news is that we know that by supporting GSAs and building those welcoming, safe, caring, inclusive schools, the reported incidents drop significantly as the school community improves: fewer homophobic remarks, less violence and harassment, more supportive environments for these students. That's why this amendment, which would extend the GSA requirements to private schools, is so important, because, of course, students from all walks of life find themselves as members of the LGBTQ community and should be supported.

Now, when I say that 87.3 per cent experienced harassment, that would include verbal harassment, which 70 per cent experienced; that would include physical harassment, which 28.9 per cent of LGBTQ students experienced – in the past year: that is what we're talking about – and unfortunately it also includes physical assaults, being punched or kicked, which 12.4 per cent of these students experienced. So we're talking about verbal and physical harassment and physical assault that students experience when they're attending school. I will remind you that this was a study done on 23,000 students between the ages of 13 and 21.

Madam Chair, I have nephews and a niece, and the idea that in a school environment they might experience homophobic remarks, verbal harassment, physical harassment is horrifying to me, but this is the true experience for many students. Again, the positive, we know, is in having safe, inclusive, supportive school policies and supporting GSAs. When students identify the need and want to start

them, supporting those students makes a real difference. That's the positive of this message.

The effect of a hostile school climate impacts students' academic success and mental health. When students experience victimization and discrimination at school, they have worse educational outcomes and poorer psychological well-being. This is something that we've talked about before in this Chamber. Making sure that there are those safe, inclusive schools, that all of our students feel safe and are able to attend fully and be present for classes is so important, and that includes both accredited private schools as well as our public schools throughout the province.

5:40 p.m.

LGBTQ students experienced higher levels of victimization because of their sexual orientation. When that happened, they were nearly three times as likely to have missed school in the past month. They had lower grade point averages. They were twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any postsecondary education. They were more likely to have been disciplined at school. They had lower self-esteem and school belonging and higher levels of depression.

When you paint the picture of students who often find themselves ostracized or victimized, you can see that they have worse educational outcomes and poorer psychological well-being. We don't want that for any Alberta students, including those who may be attending private schools. Having legislation that makes sense through this amendment to Bill 8 can have a real impact on these students in our province, students who live in each of our constituencies, students who may be members of our family. LGBTQ students who experienced LGBTQ-related discrimination at school were more than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month, had lower GPAs than their peers, were more likely to have been disciplined, and had lower self-esteem and school belonging and higher levels of depression. We're painting a very clear picture.

Now, again, here's the positive. Students who feel safe and supported at school have better educational outcomes. LGBTQ students who have LGBTQ-related school resources report better school experiences and academic success – for example, gay-straight alliances, Madam Chair – compared to LGBTQ students who did not have a GSA in their school. Students who had a GSA in their school were less likely to hear the word “gay” used in a negative way or frequently. They were less likely to hear homophobic remarks. They were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression. They were less likely to hear negative remarks about transgender people. There were more likely to report that school personnel intervened when hearing homophobic remarks compared to students without a GSA.

Staff are more likely to intervene when these negative behaviours are happening, when homophobic remarks are being made, when there's the presence of a GSA. This makes sense because likely, as a GSA is formed in any school, teachers will be talking among themselves. The teacher who is leading the GSA is likely to be sharing that information with colleagues in the school. The entire school community benefits from these gay-straight alliances that are initiated by students and supported by teachers. When there was a GSA, the students were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation than those without a GSA. They were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns.

Now, another important piece we've talked about around private schools is the requirement around inclusive and supportive school policies, and we've heard some pretty terrible school policies read into the record here in this House. What we know from this important survey was that when there was a comprehensive

antibullying and harassment policy – it needs to specifically enumerate both sexual orientation and gender identity and expression – when you had a policy that fit that definition of comprehensive, students were less likely to hear “gay” used in a negative way or frequently. There was a real, measurable impact in the school community when an appropriate and comprehensive policy was put into place, and I think that's a really important outcome to know about.

This, of course, is based on a very large, large study, 23,000 students nation-wide in the United States, and the outcomes, the results, seem to have been replicated in many other studies that I've had the opportunity to review. In listening to my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, I'm hearing very similar results from the work that she is quoting. So when we think about the high school and junior high students in our constituencies, when we think about our nephews and our nieces, our children, our friends, and our family having the best, most inclusive, supportive, and safe space, it sounds to me like a GSA is a very positive thing for the entire school community, and that's why I support amendment A4, moved by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, to extend these protections to private schools.

Now, the conclusions and recommendations of this GLSEN report read as follows.

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create safe and affirming learning environments for LGBTQ students. Results from the 2017 National School Climate Survey demonstrate the ways in which school-based supports – such as supportive staff, inclusive and supportive school policies... GSAs – can positively affect LGBTQ students' school experiences. Yet findings on school climate over time suggest that more efforts are needed to reduce harassment and discrimination and increase affirmative supports. Based on these findings, we recommend...

There are a number of recommendations. I'm just going to highlight:

supporting student clubs, such as GSAs, that provide support for LGBTQ students and address LGBTQ issues in education.

That is a core recommendation from the findings gathered by this GLSEN national school climate survey. Secondly,

ensuring that school policies and practices, such as those related to dress codes and school dances, do not discriminate against LGBTQ students.

These are recommendations that I support and that I think make sense in our Alberta school environments.

Taken together, these measures and the other recommendations can move us towards a future in which all students have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. It improves the outcomes for these students, and it continues to allow Albertans to feel like we live in and to know that we live in an inclusive and safe society, where LGBTQ2S rights are human rights, where students are respected and not outed until they choose to disclose to friends, to family on their timeline in the way that they wish to come out.

These are the reasons why I want to commend my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre for this amendment, for including private schools in this Bill 8 and the GSA protections that, we've heard over and over, so impactfully help students, not just LGBTQ students but the entire school community, including the teaching staff. I will be supporting this very well-reasoned amendment, and I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support this amendment because it will make a real difference in the lives of the students in our province, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for allowing me to rise once again and share my support for this amendment.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure once again to stand up in the House and speak in favour of this amendment. Looking at this amendment, the amendment is to Bill 8, to section 8. Supporting this amendment, I would really like to actually get back to where I was trying to read and share the information from the article. The article I was reading from was *Edutopia*, the journal published by Emelina Minero. This article further actually states and notes the need for training in schools. That can only happen if there is a policy in place, if there are guidelines for the teachers and the school administration to lay down policy to implement the work that cannot be done without, you know, having strong legislation.

*5:50 p.m.*

The article says:

For Loretta Farrell Khayam, a high school math teacher in Northern Virginia, the hesitation to support LGBTQ students . . . so she talks about that. The article goes on:

"We've had no guidance from administration on how to handle students transitioning," said Khayam, who wants to help a transgender student at her school. "I'm not a young, hip teacher. I don't know what to say or do. It would be nice to hear from our administration – both school and district level – what we as a school and a school system will do to support these students."

What she's clearly talking about is the school having a proper policy dealing with the situations and issues regarding LGBTQ protection.

Students attend an LGBTQ summit for youth. LGBTQ students often have to go outside their schools to find support.

This is very shameful, and that doesn't really help, you know, the community of vulnerable youth and really puts them in danger.

The article states:

While there has been an increased interest in training educators on topics like inherent bias and equity and inclusion, these trainings often do not include LGBTQ issues because most school systems aren't requesting it, according to educators and advocacy groups. And when teachers have asked for training, some report that they've faced reluctance from administrators who said they need to focus on other priorities.

You know, the seriousness of the people who are suffering does not take place without having the legitimate policy in place, the proper guidance, proper guidelines. That is what this amendment to the bill is going to address.

There is, I would say, very progressive opposition to this government. We're trying to come to a solution. The government in this House has claimed many times, you know, that they stand to defend GSAs and QSAs, the LGBTQ2S community, and when we're discussing the loopholes, we are pointing out the proposals in the bill that weaken how to form a QSA or GSA in the schools. GSAs and QSAs save lives and save the future and also help change people's attitudes, change the culture, I would say, with how to behave toward others, how to keep your mind open to learn about the diversity of the community.

The article says:

Melissa Joy Bollow Tempel said she encountered pushback when she wanted to start including professional development on gender identity in the training she provided as a culturally responsive teacher-leader in the Milwaukee Public Schools district. Bollow Tempel had to go outside the district to receive training herself, and her offers to share what she had learned were repeatedly resisted.

Educators talked about:

students taught an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.

"Educators still have a tremendous amount of worry around LGBTQ inclusion – they fear parent or community pushback, and are uncertain if they'd be supported by school or district leadership . . .

and lack, you know, proper guidance. It says

. . . that their administration supports them and will have their back if a parent or community member with anti-LGBTQ views complains."

It also mentions that

when LGBTQ students feel the lack of staff support at school, the impact can be substantial.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are two to three times as likely [to suffer].

Starting with the individual's struggles and lack of support, they're more likely to miss school and almost five times as likely to attempt suicide . . . the number is even higher for transgender people . . . according to a major survey of 15,600 high school students by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Another study found that bullied lesbian, gay, and bisexual students . . . reported higher levels of substance abuse and risky behaviors than heterosexual students who were bullied.

It outlines the importance of, you know, having strong legislation in regard to protecting the LGBTQ students in schools and safe spaces for them in the schools. Once again, my colleagues, hon. members from different ridings, talked about the numerous articles stating that GSAs are about saving lives. GSAs and QSAs are social clubs that provide people with a platform, the environment where they can come together and share their stories, share their cultural diversity, share their views, and help each other, a platform that helps them to know each other, that helps them to come together as a strong community.

The article also says, referring to students hearing biased language at school:

"My middle school didn't have any procedures, and my teachers didn't know what to do," reflects Miles Sanchez, a ninth-grade bisexual and transgender student . . . Sanchez says he repeatedly went to administrators to ask them to establish policies to protect LGBTQ students from bullying. "I feel like a lot of my struggles could have been avoided if educators were trained in dealing with bullying for all types of students," he said.

That's exactly what we're trying to discuss under Bill 8.

The problem is not restricted to students.

Teachers like Hanan Huneidi, a 7th- through 12-grade teacher for at-risk students . . . says she feels that if she includes LGBTQ content in her lessons, staff and students assume she's trying to push a particular agenda because she's gay.

Last year, a frustrated Huneidi told colleagues they needed to "carry the torch too" in disciplining students for using homophobic hate language, which is against school rules.

*6:00 p.m.*

Dan Ryder, a teacher at Mount Blue school in Farmington, Maine states in this article:

"I'm doing my best to show them that even though I may be a straight, cis, married white male, we are all fairly complex beings that change over time and have experiences that may unite us more than we realize," he says of his own efforts to help students. "Often we just need someone to say, 'Hey, you are who you are. I get it. It's OK by me. And I want to be helpful to you in whatever way that means for you.'"

What this article is concluding by the statement of Dan Ryder is the issue that we are arguing in the House and that matters; that is, the lack of security this Bill 8 provides to the students, LGBTQ2S- students and the students who want to be part of a GSA/QSA. Once again, referring back to the proposals in the bill, which do not really provide a time frame, if the students come to the teachers, principals, or to the administrators, it does not provide clear

guidelines or time frames for the GSA or QSA to be formed in the school.

On top of that, you know, it threatens the students to be outed outside of the school, and it provides very little protection to the vulnerable. When they kind of face this kind of an environment in the school and they can't go home, that actually puts much more pressure on them at home, even facing social stigma. A lot of families, a lot of cultures still are not really willing and open going forward. I don't know. I will say, in modern society, that the changes develop over time in society. So the fears grow in those students, and there's little help. They will be out of school. They will not be able to pursue their education. They will not be able to pursue their career. On top of that, they cannot go home probably in many cases. I'm not saying that each and every student is in the same situation, but many of them are. So they do not seek help, and in lack of all that support, they will be pressured to take the wrong step.

I've shared one article to support the argument, and we have shared the findings of how this bill is going to have a negative impact on GSAs/QSAs. It expunges the protection that is already provided through the legislation right now. It's a step moving backward. There are numerous, numerous studies done by very reputable institutions in Canada and around the world that show how important it is to have proper legislation to provide security to the LGBTQ2S community here in Alberta and around the country. This is more important than this government has acknowledged. They are the biggest defenders, they claimed, of the rights of the LGBTQ2S community, so I don't know why there'd be challenges then to, you know, withdraw those proposals. They are weakening the rights of the LGBTQ community.

Also, once again I want to affirm that you could do more than that by tabling the amendment, showing the very progressive, co-operative opposition in the House. We wanted to make this House work. We wanted to make this House work for the people of Alberta. We wanted to make this House work for the people who need our help.

I actually have more studies in my hand. I can share the study done in our country by a very reputable institution called Egale Canada human rights trust. This survey is conducted with 3,700 students here in Canada, and it has a long executive summary report, and this was . . . [Mr. Deol's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2 on Bill 8? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Did you say amendment A2?

**The Chair:** Amendment A4.

**Ms Sweet:** Okay. Just clarifying. Thank you.

It's a pleasure to rise in support of amendment A4 in regard to ensuring that private schools also provide GSAs to youth. I'll continue maybe a little bit with what I was saying earlier today around finding the balance or ensuring that adults are able and feel confident to engage in conversations with youth that are part of the LGBT community.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

In saying that, something that I did want to mention and something that I think has been missing out of parts of this conversation is the commitment of the different ministries within the government around this issue. I recognize that we've been

talking primarily around education and the school systems and this amendment specifically around private schools, but I think that as we discuss it, we should also be looking at, you know, the Ministry of Children's Services. The reason I say that is that what we see – and some of the members on both sides of this House will be able to attest to that, I believe – is that when families are not able to communicate with each other, when there's dysfunction within the relationships between parents and their children, between partners in marriages or common law, at times Children's Services is also required to become involved.

*6:10 p.m.*

In part of that I believe there's a responsibility, then, within that ministry as well as the Ministry of Education to be dialoguing with each other around how it is that we support families in talking about the LGBT community and supporting youth as they come out to their parents or to their family or to their family members, to their religious communities. I think that's important. I think that, you know, it's one thing to say that this is something we acknowledge that there needs to be protections around and that we would like to have safe spaces for youth until they're prepared to be able to talk to their family about their sexuality, but I think it's also important that we recognize that there need to be supports for parents around how you talk about that and how you support your youth when they come out to their parents or to their family.

That's just kind of a summary of what I was trying to get at earlier today in relation to this amendment and to ensuring that private schools are also engaging in supporting GSAs within the legislation and the components that they have. I think that this is extremely important. Again, as I said earlier, youth within the LGBT community are not just within one select group of communities. They're in all of our communities.

Again, recognizing that the Premier himself actually said that he believes that this legislation is going to find a balance between parents and school authorities to provide the GSAs in the way that this government has interpreted that should be – well, they don't want to support GSAs. But in saying that, the issue being that if you're not mandating schools to have groups that are going to be supportive of the LGBT community, how does that find a balance between parents and school authority? It doesn't. If you're not saying to private schools that our government's philosophy – and the Premier has been very clear, and the minister has also been very clear – is that there must be a balance between parents and the school authority, then that must mean that the school authority must then provide these organizations, these groups, these GSAs. I mean, that is the fundamental argument that this government has presented to us, right?

If you're not mandating the private schools, and you're saying that they must also provide the same groups and GSAs as every other school does within the province, then you're actually not finding balance between parents and school authorities because now you're actually giving the school authorities the out to not have to do it at all, which is counterintuitive to your argument. Because of that, this amendment actually makes sense because it actually speaks to what this government has been telling us is their argument all along, which is balance. If that's the case, then this amendment is reasonable. This amendment should be supported by all members on both sides of the House because there's no reason not to.

I mean, I would love to hear from the government-side members why this isn't speaking to your message box of balance between parents and school authorities. Where isn't it? Why wouldn't it be? Of all the other school authorities that the government has spoken about and has said, "Well, it's a balance, and school authorities have the ability, and we will find the balance between the school

authority and the parents,” then why is this one group, this one small group of schools excluded from the balance, excluded from your argument? To say that they don’t have the same requirements as every other school that is being supported within Alberta doesn’t make sense.

Again, it’s reasonable to have this in every single school. [interjection] Again, I will go back to – point of order.

#### **Point of Order Decorum**

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a point of order. Please, I would love to hear.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to speak to section 23(j), “uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.” Although it may not be language or insulting language to be sure, there have been repeated occasions over this afternoon that I have been sitting in this House that the Government House Leader has tried to be as disruptive as possible.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt you. With regard to this specific point of order that you are referring to: what were the words?

**Ms Sweet:** The actual words? Is that what you’re clarifying with me?

**The Deputy Chair:** Yeah.

**Ms Sweet:** Like I said, it’s not specific words. However, it is loud sounds. That would be, I guess, appropriate. And, just to clarify with the chair, there have been incidents in the past where body language has been considered unparliamentary in this House.

**The Deputy Chair:** I would agree.

**Ms Sweet:** I again would just like to remind all members that when they enter and go out of the Chamber, to be respectful of the decorum of the House.

**The Deputy Chair:** I would be prepared to rule on this. I think that it was clearing of the throat. I see that there’s a nod in agreement. I think that that would possibly constitute something along the lines of a cough or something like that. I think that it’s fair to say that members from both sides have had coughing instances or things of that nature that have interrupted proceedings or have potentially done something like that. In this case, I don’t find a point of order.

I would ask that if you would be so kind as to continue your remarks that you are making in debate, I would very much appreciate that.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’d love to continue.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Ms Sweet:** As I was saying, when we look at the definition of what this government has said even around charter schools, although I appreciate that the amendment is specific to private schools, it’s acknowledged that charter schools are autonomous, nonprofit, publicly funded schools with specialized mandates. Alberta is the only province in Canada that has charter schools. They’re more commonly found in the United States.

Now, charter schools were first introduced under Ralph Klein in 1994 due to his austerity measures. How are they different than public schools? Well, they’re not governed by a board elected by

the public; they are elected by their school community, similar to private schools. They do not own their own facilities. They do not have attendance boundaries, and they are not required to accept every student that applies, similar to our private schools. Their enrolment and mandates are governed by the charter. They do not always qualify for 100 per cent of public schools’ funding. They are required to hire certified teachers, but those teachers do not have to be members of the ATA, very similar to private schools.

Now, in saying that, they are still covered under this legislation and required to have the same protections for LGBTQ-plus youth, yet private schools do not. Again, I would be very curious if somebody from the government side would like to stand up and respond to why it is that this one subsection is being excluded, why the government doesn’t deem that these schools also need to have a balance between parents and the school authority, and what it is that makes them special enough that they don’t need to be under the same legislation as everybody else. Again, I would like to see the government side stand up and talk to us about some of this stuff. I think this is a reasonable amendment. It speaks to what the government has been speaking to around balance.

I will leave it at that for now and hope that someone on the government side decides to stand up and maybe answer some of those questions for me.

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

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre rising to speak.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to continue debate in this House on Bill 8 and on the amendment that I had the honour of moving on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. That amendment, again, is to correct what I’m sure was a simple oversight on behalf of government in neglecting to include private schools in the same coverage as every other school in the province of Alberta, the expectation being that government members have been very clear throughout this debate that they support GSAs and QSAs, that they recognize the value they provide, that indeed they are essential tools to provide safety and security for LGBTQ2S-plus youth.

Given that they have such thorough support, I can’t see any reason why they would feel that such a good and beneficial thing should not be provided in every school in the province of Alberta. I’m definitely looking forward to hearing government members stand up and speak in support of this amendment and, of course, voting in support of this amendment since that has been what they have been avowing throughout the course of this debate.

**6:20 p.m.**

Now, I think my colleagues and I have been very clear on the importance of this. I’ve had the chance to discuss this quite a bit from a number of different perspectives, indeed on the general value of a GSA, a QSA, but on this particular question it sort of returns us to the reasons why this bill is being introduced and the reasons why we are having this debate on the particular topic of GSAs and QSAs in the province of Alberta.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

While government members may be weary at this point of my recapping this particular point, I think it’s an important one. This is a decision this government is making to change the manner in which these supports are provided, to change the protections that are available because they feel that the provisions we brought forward in Bill 24 were either too prescriptive or discriminatory

against faith-based schools or in some way infringed on the rights of parents in the province of Alberta.

Now, that comes from previous debate and discussion and remarks of the Premier in the media and indeed at various events behind closed doors or at the UCP policy conference and a number of other venues. Very little of that, unfortunately, comes from actual discussion or debate in this House, where the closest we have come is the discussion of an ambiguous balance, and we are left to have to interpret it, then, based on previous statements and the actions that this government is choosing to take. But it seems pretty clear, as I think I've laid out pretty thoroughly in my previous comments on the record and will continue to lay out as we continue into our 27th hour of debate in this particular day of the Legislature.

We have the situation here where the government is choosing specifically to exempt a small parcel of schools within the province of Alberta and essentially saying that students at those schools do not deserve the same rights, the same opportunities, the same protections as students at any other school in the province of Alberta; that, though members of the government purportedly acknowledge that GSAs, QSAs save lives, have a profound impact on the safety of a school not only for the LGBTQ students, not only for their allies but, in fact, for all students at that school, for some reason if a school should happen to be a private school, though it is receiving a significant amount of public funds to deliver a public service, those schools should be exempt from providing those same protections and those same supports for those youth; that because a youth's parents choose to send them to that particular school, they should not be afforded that same protection, that same opportunity, that same right of assembly, that same right of free expression; that that school should be able to dictate to them in what manner they should dress; that that school should be able to have policies in place telling them that who they love is wrong; that they should go to that school every day and that apparently it should be a place of learning for them, a place where they feel comfortable, a place where they are supposed to feel accepted when that very policy of that very school condemns them, that suggests to me that members of this government do not in fact have the support that they claim they have for the LGBTQ2S-plus community.

Now, with a letter that I had from Rabbi Gila Caine, I discussed earlier her principles that she sets forward from the Judaic tradition where in their belief if a religious belief conflicts with an opportunity to prevent harm to an individual, be that physical, emotional, spiritual, then that religious belief is set aside. That is an honourable tradition, Madam Chair. That is one I respect greatly, and I think that is the least we can expect from any organization that receives public funds to deliver a public service when it comes to the well-being of our youth in our schools, their physical, their emotional, their mental, their spiritual well-being.

There is no reason to provide this exception, to provide this loophole, and indeed I have yet to hear any member of this government stand up to defend it or provide any reason why the health and well-being of those youth should be put at risk, why in this particular circumstance, unlike any other, we should simply assume and depend on the goodwill of all involved in these schools. That is not to suggest that goodwill is not present in the majority of these cases, but it is our job as government to legislate and regulate for those circumstances where goodwill is not present.

We don't say that certain health and safety regulations aren't necessary because the majority of employers will likely abide by them. "We know that they have goodwill and that they wouldn't want to harm their employees; therefore, we can simply trust them on that point." No. We regulate it, and we make sure that that regulation applies in all circumstances, and if we make an

exception, we are able to stand in this House and articulate a good reason for doing so.

Yet this government is deliberately choosing to exempt private schools, which receive public money to deliver a public service and a public good on behalf of the people of Alberta, from very simple provisions which protect the health and well-being of youth in our schools, something on which all members in this Chamber have said they agree. Not a single member of this House has stood and said that they disagree that a GSA, a QSA is a good thing, that it should be allowed, that youth should have the opportunity to access it, yet on this particular point they are turning their backs and are saying precisely the opposite.

Now, I understand, I think, to some extent where some of these members of the government are coming from. Certainly, the Premier on occasion has talked about this being a question of parents' rights, and certainly that's been the basis of the arguments by the Premier's close friend and ally John Carpay, amongst several other, much more reprehensible arguments, the main principle being that he feels this is something that is contravening parents' rights, that parents are choosing to send their kids to these schools because they want their kids to grow up with the same values that their parents hold.

**Mr. Getson:** Is it Carpay with a "k" or a "c"?

**Mr. Shepherd:** Carpay is spelled with a "c," Member.

**Mr. Getson:** I'm looking, but I've never heard of this guy.

**Mr. Shepherd:** You're not very familiar with your leader's record in that case, Member.

**Mr. Getson:** Not about any of the guys you're talking about.

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Anyways, through the chair – through the chair – for any members that are not familiar with Mr. John Carpay, you can certainly find out a good deal about him and his involvement with the leader of your party, which stretches back for a good while.

**Mr. Getson:** Was he from Edmonton-City Centre?

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Continuing with the debate, Madam Chair, I recognize that the main complaint seems to be that if parents want to send their children to a school which will tell them that because of how they identify, who they are, or who they love, they themselves are wrong, are morally inferior, are intrinsically disordered, or whatever way you want to put it, that government should in no way interfere with that process.

Therefore, because, again, no member of this government will stand to explain why they're providing this glaring exception, I can only assume it's for the purpose that they believe that if a parent chooses, they should be able to send their child to a school that will tell that child what orientation they're allowed to have, what gender identity they're allowed to express, what clothing they're able to wear, and how acceptable they are morally for doing so or making that choice. But, frankly, Madam Chair, I think there is far more to it than this.

**6:30 p.m.**

I respect the need or the desire for parents to want to pass their values on to their children, and that is something we respect in every home. I do not believe governments should interfere with what

parents want to teach their children within their home or within their relationships with them, but if they are going to a school that is receiving public money to provide a public service, a school that is there for the purpose of educating youth, of preparing them to live in the world, the objective of a school being to encourage the health and well-being and the future success of that child, then that child should be afforded all the same opportunities they would be afforded at any other institution in the province receiving public funds to deliver that same public service and public good. And if we recognize that no child in a public school or a Catholic school should be told that because of who they are, how they identify, and who they love, they are a broken human being, that there is something wrong with them that needs to be fixed, then it also should not take place in any private institution which is receiving public funds.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

That is why we're bringing forward this amendment, to correct what, again, since no member of this government has stood up to defend or explain this exemption, must clearly just be an oversight. Again, every single member in this House agrees that a QSA or a GSA is a good thing that provides good protections for youth, and it should not matter where that GSA or that QSA is located. It does not lose its efficacy because it's in a private school, and neither does that school lose its ability to hold whatever values it wants to hold, nor do the parents of the child going to that school.

As I've noted, Mr. Chair, I grew up in a conservative, religious environment. There are some good things that I carry forward from that upbringing, and there are some not so good. But it was an interesting experience, and indeed I've often had the opportunity to connect with others who grew up in similar environments. One of those is a good friend of mine, a writer and a poet who just published a new column in the *Edmonton Journal* talking about how we, how parents – I shouldn't say "we" because I myself am not a parent. I have many nieces and nephews and have good relationships with them, but, no, I haven't had children of my own. But she talks about the challenge for parents in talking with their kids about complex issues and the desire of a parent to want to pass on their values, to communicate their values with their children. She's talking about, you know, having some of these conversations with her son.

She talks about how when she went to school, she was sent to a school where they taught her that dinosaurs were created by God about 6,000 years ago and that she believed what she was told at that time and that she indeed believed that those parents that sent their kids to that school, including her own, supported that because they truly believed in that educational model. "They [really] wanted their children to understand what they themselves had come to understand – what they believed . . . about the world."

But she also talks about recognizing the need to understand the needs of her children and recognizing that while she wants to communicate to them the values that she has, the way that she sees the world, she also wants them to be able to learn and experience and figure some of these things out for themselves, that indeed, in fact, she learns from them, just as they learn from her.

Now, she says, you know:

Three decades past the scene of my early paleontological miseducation, any four-year-old I [could] meet can still school me about dinosaurs and geological eras. There are persistent gaps in my understanding of the world. We all renegotiate the explanations we are given by our parents, if to varying degrees.

She says of children:

Maybe the important thing is just to honour this basic fact: they are forming their own understandings of the world. Theirs; not ours.

We will [at times], inevitably, get it wrong.

Our children will grow to correct us.

Can we encourage them as they grow to see even our most cherished explanations as what they are – our explanations, our best understandings?

I think, Mr. Chair, particularly as children grow older, as they enter into adolescence, within the space of a school, which is intended not only to teach and communicate values but to allow young people to exercise critical thinking, to decide ideas for themselves, to understand themselves better, to learn how to express themselves, that the highest value, then, should be to ensure that they have a safe space in which to do so. Every single member in this House so far that has spoken on the record has said that they value that in a GSA or a QSA, that that is something that should exist for all youth to be able to explore, yet we have this gap.

We're saying that in a private school, regardless of the fact that it receives public funds to deliver a public service, we should not hold that expectation. Those youth should simply be told what values they should hold. They should not be allowed a safe space in which they can ask questions or explore. They should not have the right to name that group what they wish. In fact, they should not even have the right to that assembly. It should be the prerogative of that school to be able to deny it and say: "You cannot do that here. You cannot be who you are in these walls. We will not allow it. We will tell you that it is wrong. Every day you will come to this school and you will face a charter or a set of values that tell you that you are wrong, because we feel it is more important that we assert that value than that we provide you with a place to feel safe emotionally, physically, spiritually."

I can see no other message here unless a member of this government wants to get up and enlighten me as to why they are overlooking this piece, why they are saying that the students that attend these schools do not deserve the same rights and protections and opportunities that we are all apparently in agreement with and saying that every student in a public or Catholic school should have.

Again, the only reason not to do this is because members are choosing to placate people who spread misinformation, conspiracy theories.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, on amendment A4, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to speak.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. A pleasure to rise once again in this House in another part of the day to talk once again about Bill 8 and the amendments thereto, this time amendment A4, which, for all intents and purposes, is specifically designed to bridge the gap that the legislation has in it right now, and that is the gap whereby the private schools are exempted from the requirements under the bill that other . . . [An electronic device sounded] Oops. Yeah. Well, even Jim Cuddy is against Bill 8, I tell you.

6:40 p.m.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, please continue. There may be a charitable donation in the future.

**Mr. Dach:** I heard that coming on, and I caught it in time, I think. Anyways, apologies for that to all members. I think I got the rest of this shut off, but that one element was still on.

That reminds me a little bit about the legislation here, where all schools except the private schools are required to follow the dictates that GSAs and QSAs have to be allowed, yet there's this giant loophole in the legislation that is quietly being given life under the

radar. I fail to understand, if indeed this is what the government wants to accomplish, why they don't just openly and honestly say what they're really up to. People here have been beating around the bush for two or three days on this legislation, even longer.

I'm not one to beat around the bush. It makes me want to light my hair on fire when I hear some of the arguments or hear the Minister of Education talk about how they are, "Yes, providing protection for every student in the classes that we have and every student in Alberta; whether it be in private, charter, or public schools, they've all got the strongest level of protections in Canada for their ability to come forward; yes, they can create a GSA or a QSA, and all schools are required to do so and follow through" while, in fact, a clear reading of the legislation shows this to be utterly not the scenario that is correct.

The loopholes that the legislation has in it, one of which is being addressed by this amendment, are large, and they're glaring. The reasoning for it has yet to be explained by the government. I think that if the government is really intent on bringing forward the legislation with these loopholes in it, with the private schools being exempted, there's an onus and a responsibility to explain why. What's the justification? What's the rationale? There is none as far as I can tell. So far the government has come up with none, and they're not willing to provide one.

The only one that I can come up with is that it's religious fundamentalism in power. It's a matter of basically recognizing on the part of the government that they have a large part of their supporters who want to shoot, shovel, and shut up. In other words, they want to under the radar, under the carpet allow what otherwise wouldn't be allowed in this legislation, by giving a loophole that they hope private schools can quietly use to allow principals to avoid establishing GSAs, to allow this population of individuals, of parents whose religious beliefs do not include the acceptance of a certain part of our population being LGBTQ2S-plus, to basically put their children in schools where they would not be forced to allow a QSA or a GSA to be established.

I'm just wondering what would happen in many of these families with parents who would support this type of bill. What would happen if indeed one of their children was to come to them and tell them that they were not heterosexual? I don't know the conversation that would ensue, but it scares the heck out of me. I know that many of the young people who are in the shelters, in what used to be known as youth emergency shelters, are coming from families where these conversations were had and the result was that the student, youngster, the family member was ostracized and kicked out of the family. They were living on the street. That ends up badly in most cases, Mr. Chair. The private schools that would be exempted under the legislation, unless this amendment is passed, would be able to withstand the requirement to actually have a GSA or a QSA established, and those students would be living in the same black hole that all students in this province lived in before our previous government established the requirement that GSAs and QSAs had to be established on demand, without delay, in all charter, public, and private schools.

There were some outliers who had yet to comply. Those individual private schools and charter schools who had yet to comply faced some pretty severe sanctions if indeed ultimately they refused to comply. What we do have here with this amendment, Mr. Chair, is an attempt to close a gate that the government has opened in the legislation, in Bill 8, to allow those schools who harbour resentment toward the requirement in our legislation to create GSAs and QSAs on demand, without delay, without exemption – it allows those private schools to have a safe harbour.

That troubles me a lot, to know that there exist a group of educators, a group of parents who, under the cloak of parental

choice and parental rights, suggest that the educational institutions that they want to send their children to somehow should be able to resist the requirement to provide a safe space for students who may wish to come forward and create a GSA or a QSA and, hopefully, reach some type of arrangement whereby they can discover the language and an environment to talk to their parents ultimately, to decide how to reveal to those parents that they are not heterosexual, that they are LGBTQ2S-plus, and thereby keep the family unit together.

I know that there are members opposite who have worked in the field where they've dealt with young people in these dark situations, and it befuddles me to understand how they can work in situations like that, where they're dealing with individual young people who are confounded and conflicted yet stand by and watch their legislation allow a huge loophole to evade the fundamental responsibility to keep children safe in their schools. I can only say that the answer for it is political. The only explanation I can get is that the government members, who were, of course, formerly in opposition, who opposed our legislation, are responding to a political call from a cadre of their supporters who just don't believe that gay rights should exist, and they deny the need for young people to have a safe space and an outlet.

They claim that the whole discussion should be, you know, left to parents and the children. Well, I'll tell you what, Mr. Chair. If indeed the students in this situation felt safe in doing so, if there was a good relationship there between those parents and those students, then that conversation would take place within the family without episode. But what we're dealing with here are students who don't feel safe, who understand the confines of the religious ideology that their family exists in. [An electronic device sounded] Oh, jeez. I apologize. There. [An electronic device sounded] Jim Cuddy refuses to go away. There we go. I'll shut this thing off.

**The Deputy Chair:** We are getting frightfully close to a fine or a charitable contribution.

**Mr. Dach:** There we go. We all operate within rules, and I'm nudging up against them here.

**The Deputy Chair:** Please continue.

*6:50 p.m.*

**Mr. Dach:** I think I've got it covered this time, and I'll get rid of it. There. It will not drone on.

In any case, Mr. Chair, these families who want the exemptions that the legislation allows befuddle me because I can't understand why anybody would want to put children's lives at risk, whether it's your own kid or your neighbour's. This is what we've been talking about all along. I mean, the whole reason that we placed the requirement for these GSAs and QSAs to be established in every school, regardless of whether they're private, charter, or public, was ultimately that they would save children's lives. Conversely, not having these safe spaces is going to cost children's lives, arguably.

I do believe that there's a way of actually accounting for the lives that will be lost, I contend, as a result of Bill 8 passing, if it does, without the amendment that we seek to get rid of the exclusions that are part of the current legislation. I think there's a way of tabulating the number of lives that are ultimately lost as a result of these children not having the safe spaces or not feeling that these spaces are enabling them to come forward, where they feel they are in such a dark hole and have no place to go, no safe place to go, that they do end up either outed by the school system that they happen to be in or just feel that there's no way, no mechanism, no safe space for them to learn how to come forward to their parents, and they

ultimately either get kicked out, or they leave the home seeking a space where they can live and be the people they are.

That quite often at a young age leads to couch surfing with older people and living on the street, living in and amongst drug addiction, depression, mental illness, and ultimately abuse by people who take advantage of those risk factors. The individual lives that do end up lost as a result of the government's reversion to a lack of safe spaces for these individual young people to go to is something that we, I think, have a responsibility at least to do as legislators, and that is to account for these individual lives lost to ensure that those lives that are lost as a result of this legislation are tallied properly and accurately.

I know I've wondered aloud before in this Legislature about having the Child and Youth Advocate enabled and instructed to look directly at this issue and determine which youth in Alberta have perished as a result of being outed, while in school, by a school administrator or have ended up on the street as a result of having no safe space to go to discuss their sexuality with their parents and who felt they had no place to go.

My point is that I think we have a responsibility to understand why young people are dying. The death of a young person is certainly a concern for everybody in our society. No matter how those deaths occur, I think we should be knowing the intricate details of why. I know that the Child and Youth Advocate has a responsibility to investigate the death of minors in this province, and I believe he's already issued a couple of reports on the death of people who have been under the age of 18 in the LGBTQ2S-plus community. I'd be very interested to know if current legislation allows the Child and Youth Advocate to make a better-detailed tally and report to the Legislature on the death of young people either as a result of their being outed or failing to find a safe space to communicate to their family and ending up on the streets and somehow losing their life.

I mean, the whole issue that we've been talking about and the reason the opposition, that I'm so proudly a member of, is talking about this and keeping the issue alive and trying to raise awareness isn't to score political points. I mean, this is fundamentally about saving children's lives. I don't know if the front bench of the government gets it. Certainly, the Education minister doesn't seem to. Certainly, the Premier doesn't seem to accept this. I appeal to every other member of the government to fully accept that children's lives are at risk. That's why we initiated the GSA and QSA requirements for all schools in our legislation, and that's why we're fighting so hard to maintain them in the legislation that the government is bringing forward right now, Bill 8. The amendment that we're talking about, Mr. Chair, is just one element of that fight. Fundamentally, we're talking about the lives of students and young people.

Exempting private schools is done for a reason. A member from the opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, I think, was maybe extending a courtesy to the government when he recently stated that he felt that maybe it was simply a slight oversight on the part of the government to exempt the private schools. He mentioned that charter schools and other schools are covered by the legislation, but the private schools are exempted from the requirement under the act. He was being more than charitable, I think, when he suggested that it was perhaps simply an oversight by the government.

In my mind, I don't see this government as having too many oversights when it comes to the social policy that is so fundamentally important to such a large section of their political supporters, not to mention a good cross-section of the freshly elected MLAs. I think this legislation, Bill 8, is a clear reflection of the types of nomination races that took place to end up with

candidates that ultimately got elected in the UCP government positions. There were many, many battles that were won by people who ended up taking office, ultimately imposing their fundamentalist views on government policy. That's what we're challenged with today.

But it still doesn't mean that we don't need to consider the human rights that underlie the very foundation of our society. Indeed, what we're missing sight of is that these young people have a human right to be who they are and to exist and to hopefully expect from the society that they live in that there be enough compassion amongst legislators.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen to speak to amendment A4.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to stand in support of the amendment that we're referring to as A4. I, of course, am in support of it. We know that one of the concerns that we had when we were government was that the private schools, 28 of them, to be specific, were unwilling to develop policies and create GSAs as the Minister of Education at that time wished them to. You know, we experienced, obviously, some difficulty, so children, youth, students in those schools did not have access to GSAs.

*7:00 p.m.*

As many of the hon. members on this side of the House have talked about extensively, we know that GSAs make a huge difference in the lives of students and are not only beneficial to young people struggling with their sexual orientation but also to heterosexual students as well. I think that this amendment is key to making sure that all students in Alberta have the support of a GSA. It's fundamental to their well-being, and I certainly have spoken, as many of the members on this side have, about the extensive benefits, not only to this community but to other students, of having GSAs in their school.

I was referring to some research in my earlier speech, and I still have some outstanding pieces of it. For people who may have just joined us or who left, I want to also do a quick summary to help them know what I'll be speaking about and the article I'm referencing. It's from a publication from July 2017, the *Journal of School Health*. LGBTQ Youth's Views on Gay-Straight Alliances: Building Community, Providing Gateways, and Representing Safety and Support: that's the title of the publication. As I said previously, the researchers of this: it's sort of multidisciplinary. It has PhD social workers, psychologists, nurses. It's a broad range of academic backgrounds that are, you know, working together to assess, really, the impact that GSAs have on a school system.

You know, just in brief:

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the varied experiences of LGBTQ youth involved in GSAs, and, specifically, the functions they perceive that GSAs serve in their lives.

It's qualitative research. The sample was 14- to 19-year-old youth in both Canada and the U.S., so it was a North American study. It was an open-ended interview process where students were asked six open-ended questions about GSAs, and they did then sort of transcribe those interviews and then coded them.

Out of the data emerged three substantial themes that really indicated the very significant transformative quality and ability of GSAs to impact schools. The first theme that they had – the most dominant theme, I guess, is what I'm trying to say – is that they provided an opportunity for a community to be built both for

students as part of that community and heterosexual allies. That was a significant, fundamental finding from the research.

The second was that GSAs serve as gateways. This gives students access to adult mentors, access to resources in the greater community. It could be a health clinic or things like that. That was the second emergent theme that came out of the research.

The third emerging theme was that GSAs represent safety. I had talked earlier about the first two but just had not finished up with the very last theme of the research, so I'm going to share that now with the House. The youth, the subjects of the research, again, these 14- to 19-year-olds

interpreted the presence of a GSA as a significant marker of safety [in their schools]. Highlighting this, one participant said: "It's mainly a safe space where we can talk about anything that we want to. Like, we don't even talk about queer things sometimes. We might just talk about movies, and it's just a [really great] place to hang out."

That was from a 16-year-old.

Several youth commented that the presence of a GSA in a school indicated that the school was both safe and desirable. Students wanted to attend schools with a GSA and expressed disappointment with schools that did not have a GSA. In one instance, the presence of a GSA was seen as a selling point, to make a school more attractive to [the] LGBTQ [community]: "The GSAs from different schools will come to the health fair and say, 'Hey, if you're thinking about switching schools, this school has a GSA.'"

So it was actually, you know, a way that students could be wooed from one school to another because this was a positive aspect, and specifically in this case we're talking about just a feeling of welcoming and safety in that school.

Moreover, when a GSA was present, youth interpreted the climate of the school as safe. It seemed that schools allowing a GSA to form and operate were assumed to be welcoming to LGBTQ students: "Google like what schools in [city] have GSAs, those places are usually safe."

So this is sort of a suggestion to other students. They're saying that you should google those schools, and then if they have a GSA, you know that's a good school for you to go to.

A youth used her affiliation with the GSA to convey safety when introducing herself to new students: "I was, like, 'hey, guys, I'm head of the GSA, like, what are your pronouns?'"

Come on over: it was really a welcoming and an accepting environment. Those students who didn't have a GSA were really encouraged to go to other schools, and some of them did change because of the safety.

The purpose of the study, of course, as I've talked about, is just wondering what those mechanisms are. Why is a GSA so great? Why does it make such a big difference for students? Of course, of the emergent themes, as I've already discussed, the big one is building community. Students who otherwise felt isolated, who were afraid to share their sexual orientation, who were afraid to be different and didn't see any spaces for them to be safe in did not share that, but when there was a GSA, that immediately created this haven for them.

As we've talked about extensively this afternoon and last evening and for some time, sometimes there are just not those safe spaces in their homes, so these students are really looking for a place, and a school can absolutely provide that. And when it isn't in their home, then it can make a huge difference for that child. I mean, that's a really significant impact.

Of course, that's the number one emergent theme that the students themselves identified, that they really, fundamentally wanted to be accepted for who they were as they discovered that themselves. I had talked earlier about just how fundamental that is

to, you know, us as human beings, our need to belong, and when we are feeling isolated and different, how detrimental that can be to our well-being.

Of course, the second theme is just about the gateway to other adults who have the same lived experience and can help guide these, you know, youth. The teens said that it was so important for them to be able to just maybe bounce an idea off someone, and their accepting nature and their support and their ability to sort of point them in the direction that they needed to go in were so important to, again, that youth's well-being. That was the second emergent theme.

Then, of course, the last one is safety. We know that when GSAs are in schools, they're more likely to be, you know, more inclusive environments. They are safer spaces not only for LGBTQ kids but also for heterosexual males. I mean, there was a study out of B.C. where they looked at about 40,000 students. A lot of times there can be a hierarchy in who's the best, who's on the football team, who's the coolest guy. Sometimes someone who may be more book smart or a gamer or something is kind of not part of that sort of accepted view, and they can be open to bullying.

I mean, I shared earlier about when my son was much younger. My middle son, when he was in elementary, was kind of a timid, quiet guy, wasn't sort of the most outgoing fellow. He was the subject of tremendous bullying when he was little, that really created some severe challenges for him and, I think, still does in his life. I just know that the safety aspect of the third . . .

7:10 p.m.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member with regard to the comments that you're making, but I do just want to ensure that the House does stay cognizant of the fact that we are on amendment A4, which is primarily regarding private schooling and issues surrounding this bill. I was just wondering if the hon. member would please tie it to the amendment, and if so, then please continue.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I did speak initially about the importance of it being in both the private and public systems. The benefits go across both those systems, and therefore it's very important that GSAs be available. The amendment does talk about the private school system and ensuring that there are GSAs in that system also. I feel that it's applicable. We're talking about the benefits and why it's so important. You know, Bill 8 and this amendment will help all students regardless of the school system they go to. Regardless of it being private or public, they do receive the access to a GSA. This is an amendment that I think is so important and that the government should seriously consider.

Despite some of the views and the values of the private school system – there may be perhaps a lack of understanding that sexuality is something that's innate in people. It's not something where people are deciding if they're this or that. I think that it's really important for us to respect that. Having a GSA for students who are trying to understand and grapple with that, in either the private or the public system, is certainly extremely important.

The beneficial results of having GSAs for students beyond the LGBTQ community have been well documented. I was referring to a study in B.C. where for heterosexual males, actually, if they had suicidal thoughts and were sort of feeling isolated and separated, that diminished by 50 per cent. It's a huge impact on the whole community because there is an understanding of the inclusiveness of people, who are all being accepted along the whole spectrum. That's why this is so important.

I just would like to say that I think we need to be very careful about the decisions we make in this House because how they impact the lives of youth in our province, whether they're at a private school or a public school, is significant. We want to make sure that we are doing the best we can for the youth. Certainly, it's supported by the research. This is why I'm referring to this study, that was published back in 2017. The youth in this sample did recognize that GSAs were important in ways that are consistent with the benefits that have previously been identified in the research.

This isn't the only research study that shows this. It is pretty important in many studies. I have quoted Dr. Kristopher Wells previously, who is an associate professor at MacEwan University. He has done extensive study and recently wrote an opinion editorial in the *Journal* talking about, really, the damage of not having that, of not making sure that there is a timely creation of a GSA when a principal is asked to create that. I just want to reiterate how important it is and that this is a serious matter.

Certainly, when I was, you know, young myself, which was many years ago, this was unheard of. There was no sense that people would be supported in this way, but I know that now, with three sons of my own, I see the difference it makes in schools and that people who are different in all sorts of ways are accepted, and there's much more understanding that way.

It's really sad that there is sort of this exception for private schools so that they're not just included in the general system. We want to make sure that all students, regardless of if they're going to the private school or the public school, have access to GSAs and that we make sure they have, you know, really, access to the transformational power of these organizations. Because people have the connection, that means the affinity, the acceptance, and they aren't socially isolated, which can be very challenging for especially young people and have some really negative ramifications for their mental health throughout their lives if they may be experiencing some trauma.

Certainly, I mean, that's one of the deepest pains that I think anybody can receive: if they're rejected at home, if they're rejected by their own parents. There's a deep bond and love in that parent-child relationship, and if a child starts to express that they have a certain sexual orientation that their parents don't agree with, that can be devastating to that child.

As we know, 50 per cent of homeless youth do identify with that community. We know that people don't tolerate it, and they kick them out of their homes. That's why it's so important, whether you're in the private or the public system, that you make sure there is a GSA created in a timely fashion for those students so that they can, you know, for some part of the day, have a bit of a haven, a place where they know there are other people that are like them, where there's an adult who can help guide them, be a gateway to programs or services that they may need.

This is just life-changing, and it saves lives. We know that there are, unfortunately, too many stories about young children taking their lives because they felt like they didn't belong and they didn't have that acceptance. Mr. Chair, I think that it's so vital that both private and public schools be sure to have GSAs in a timely fashion and that students be supported by this. I really urge the hon. members on the government side to know the decision that they're making in looking at this amendment and making sure that students are cared for and supported as they really struggle.

High school wasn't the best time of my life; that's for sure. It's hard for someone from a dominant culture, and I'd say that I'm from a dominant culture. I'm a Caucasian person, and I'm also heterosexual, so I'm sort of part of a privileged class. I can fit into society more than someone who is a lesbian or gay or a person of

colour or something like that. It's really important that they have places for kids to feel some affinity, because they are not feeling like they do belong in communities, and perhaps there are lots of messages that they're getting. It may be at home, in their church. It could be just, you know, talking with other kids.

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

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West rising to speak on amendment A4.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it, and I'm very happy to see you as well. I'm very happy to, you know, just convey a few thoughts and words around amendment A4 on Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. This amendment I was very keen to see because, of course, it is compelling private schools to adhere to the same rules around GSAs and QSAs in general.

7:20 p.m.

Again, I know as a former Education minister myself that this was a very important component of ensuring that safe and caring schools did apply to all places and schools that were receiving public funds here in the province of Alberta for education. As I'm sure you know, Mr. Chair, the private schools here in the province of Alberta receive 70 per cent of the funding that other schools here in the province do receive. I mean, that is not an insubstantial amount. I'm pretty sure that's if not the highest percentage of funding for private schools here in the country, then it's certainly amongst those. I guess I was always of the adage that if you are receiving public funding, then you need to follow the rules, just like everybody else, right?. This idea that you would change the rules for private schools although they are receiving quite a substantial percentage of funding: I really don't think that that's in line or symmetrical with the whole idea of having safe and caring schools in general.

I know that the analogy is not entirely congruent, but I was very happy to see a private member's bill, I believe, passed here in this same Chamber this session around anaphylaxis medication – right? – and this was a private member's bill that ensured that all schools would have these medications available for emergencies. You know, again, I could be wrong, but I'm pretty sure that that law applied to all schools, period. So you can't exclude basic laws or basic guidelines that ensure the safety and health of students in any school regardless of the structure of that school.

You know, I as minister certainly always made sure that we were having equitable funding for all forms of education here in the province of Alberta, be it a public school or separate schools, Catholic schools, or charter schools or francophone schools or private schools or home-schooling as well. Even in the midst of an economic downturn we did ensure that all those different choices of school were adequately funded. I was quite proud of that, quite frankly, because I know that school choice is an important element of who we are and how we provide education here in the province of Alberta, and I was glad to make sure that those choices were funded and, you know, intact. Even during the economic downturn, even though we had to make sacrifices in other areas, we ensured that funding for all different forms of school choice was remaining.

I mean, that being said, you need to make sure that those same schools that are being publicly funded, all those different forms of choice, have to make sure they follow the rules, Mr. Chair, and making sure that they follow the curriculum – right? – to ensure that kids are getting that high quality of education that we expect and that we have some standard of expectation of, you know, regardless of the different form of schooling that people might choose to use.

Part of that is to make sure that there is a safe and caring environment in schools to promote all of the benefits that we've heard about from various members here over the last couple of days on the protections that a safe and caring environment does afford students, not just the students who choose to join a GSA or a QSA but the overall environment and the safe and caring environment that GSAs or QSAs do help to nurture, right? Of course, we do know and we've seen emerging evidence that in schools that do have GSAs, QSAs and have that choice available to them, the students are feeling the benefit of that safe and caring environment even if they're not joining the GSA or the QSA. They can see that their most vulnerable student mates in the school are being looked after and are protected. When you do have rules to protect vulnerable students, then everybody recognizes that, and they say: "Hey, you know what? This is great, and I'm looked after as well, and those students are, too."

That's a great foundation to further positive outcomes for education and positive mental health outcomes as well. I mean, I know as a teacher that it's absolutely essential. A precondition to good education outcomes is that a student must first feel safe and secure and confident in the school environment in which they are learning. You know, that precondition before you start to learn your math and your language arts and science and so forth is a foundational element of good education.

You know, here we are in 2019, and we came so far, Mr. Chair, quite frankly, over these last number of years. I can tell you, not just as the minister but as a teacher of 20 years, that the evolution and the understanding of the benefits of creating a safe and caring environment for all students regardless of their sexual or gender orientation is self-evident, but it wasn't immediately self-evident, nor was it immediately universally accepted. I know from teaching, as I said, for 20 years previous that this was an evolution that was quite slow in coming, really.

Quite frankly, on a personal basis, I did benefit from the education that I learned around the positive effects of GSAs and QSAs just over the last number of years. I mean, I sort of picked up some version of that before as a teacher, but it became abundantly clear to me through both experiential and anecdotal evidence and actual gathered evidence that this is a self-evident thing, right?

Who are we, quite frankly – you know, we want school choice to be widely various in its derivations and its outcomes, I suppose, but I don't think it's negotiable, when you are issuing public monies, to suggest that some schools are exempt from the rules around GSAs and QSAs.

You know, as I think back to Bill 10, which I was in the House to debate and so forth a number of years ago, I think that there was sort of an unspoken or perhaps a quietly spoken idea of: well, do you really need to follow this rule? Again, it's hard to pinpoint or nail down, but I get some evidence from that because the Bill 10 version of safe and caring schools didn't have timelines for people to set up GSAs or QSAs. It didn't have provisions or strict provisions around the confidentiality of those meeting places for kids, just a whole litany of loopholes, quite frankly.

I only made Bill 24, the provisions of Bill 24, which are pretty simple, really, when it comes down to it, (a) that we maintain the confidentiality of students if they choose to join a GSA and choose to have that sense of confidentiality in joining, (b) that they can be called GSAs or QSAs if they so choose to use those names – some places have chosen other names, and that's great, but to be able to use those names – and (c) to make sure that there's timely creation of a GSA or a QSA if students choose to form one and having teacher supervision around that.

I mean, you know, they're very basic rules, and they're nothing different from anything that you would expect, but I made all of those rules based on actual things that were happening in schools around the province. I literally had, you know, people complaining about the untimely access to creating a GSA, that schools or school boards or principals or whatever maybe were just simply ragging the puck – right? – not forming that GSA in a timely way, hoping that maybe the students would just back down or graduate or change their mind or whatever.

7:30 p.m.

I had a number of schools and school boards that would refuse to call a GSA or a QSA by that very name, so we had to make rules about that. We had lots of serious concerns that stemmed from the leader of this government party suggesting that students that would join a GSA or a QSA would be outed and so on – right? – a lack of supervision or whatever.

I mean, those are all very practical rules that we've set in place based on how we saw things unfolding in the field. Those same things: I think they're very basic expectations. I don't think anybody would, you know, choose to take exception to those rules, right? I think that they are basic rules of thumb if students want to choose to form a GSA, call it as such, have the safety of the confidentiality, if they choose to do so, and to see the school compelled to create that safe and caring environment in a timely way.

You know, if we're doling out money to any form of school – I mean, besides home-schooling, obviously – then I think those same rules should apply. When I say these very simple words, I think they resonate with the vast majority of people. If you are taking public money for education, you have to follow the rules, just like everybody else. There's no exception for those basic rules.

Lo and behold, as the drama did unfold – right? – we ended up with all the public schools in the province of Alberta, all public school boards, doing a great job, adhering to those rules, creating safe and caring policies, and, I would dare say, Mr. Chair, doing a really great job of that. All of the Catholic schools in the province of Alberta, all Catholic school boards, follow those basic rules and created safe and caring policies that were pretty awesome, quite frankly, infusing articles of faith into those rules and, I think, doing a great job of managing the responsibilities that they have.

All of the charter schools follow the same policy – right? – 14 charter schools. Some of them have multiple branches and, you know, lots of kids, thousands of kids. They built safe and caring policies which were pretty awesome. They did a great job, and they followed the rules.

All of the francophone schools: same thing. You know, they did a great job, and I'm super proud of them. The vast majority of the private schools followed the same rules as well and did a good job, and I was very proud of the outcomes that they achieved as well.

It makes me wonder: why are we here changing what is demonstrably a success story around the development and understanding of and education on what GSAs are and what the benefits of them are as well? By excluding private schools from that same thing here in Bill 8, I wonder: what's the point? I think people follow rules. We make lots of rules and so forth here through this Chamber. I mean, that's our job, and we do it based on a demonstrable need for, you know, ensuring that things get done in a reasonable and equitable and just manner.

Amendment A4, I think, is an idea that is eminently reasonable. It's, again, going back to a place that we managed to achieve over the last few years here in the province and enshrining that in law. I don't really see a problem with that. In fact, I encourage it, very much so, and I'm really glad that the Member for Edmonton-

Highlands-Norwood moved this forward. I did help her to point this out, and I think our caucus is feeling very strongly about it as well, right?

Private schools are what they are, and as I said before, from the beginning of my comments, we support all different forms of choice in education here in the province of Alberta. I think it's something that can be demonstrably said to be true over the last number of years, through funding, and even before that. Our Alberta New Democrats have spoken around these things, and I think that this is a continuation of that. We do support different forms of choice in our schools, but we want to make sure that everybody follows the rules. You don't have the allocation of public funds without following the rules for schools attached to that. I mean, it's as simple as that, quite frankly. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-South understands this implicitly, and he probably has many things to add to that same concept.

I encourage everyone here in the Chamber this evening, this lovely evening, to join me in supporting amendment A4 with regard to Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see that the hon. Minister of Education has caught my eye to speak.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would absolutely agree with the hon. member that private schools should have to conform to the same rules and regulations. That's why it is in the act. I'll be happy to read it. It is in the act, the Education Act, on page 34.

*Application of Act to private schools*

30(1) The following provisions and any regulations made under them apply to a registered or accredited private school and its operation, and a reference in those provisions or those regulations to a board or a trustee is deemed to include a reference to the person responsible for the operation of a private school or a member of the governing body of the operator of a private school, as the case may be.

Then it goes to:

- (a) sections 1 and 2;
- (b) in Part 1, sections 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9(2) and (4);
- (c) in Part 2, sections 16, 17, 18, 29 and 30;
- (d) in Part 3, sections 31, 32 and 35.1, section 42, except subsection (3), in respect of appeals referred to in section 58.2, and Division 7.

This was taken directly out of the School Act and absolutely enforces the fact that we will have private schools adhering to the law of the Education Act. We have been saying all along that it's there in black and white. We continue to say it. It is there, and we will have our private schools adhering to the same rules and regulations that all other schools do. Whether they be public or francophone or charter or separate schools, all will adhere to the law. We will have the most comprehensive statutory protections for LGBTQ students, whether they choose an inclusion group or whether they choose a GSA or a QSA. We continue to say that.

This, again, is another indication of bringing forward an amendment that is already in the act, and it's redundant. I question: why are we continuing to bring forward amendments that are already there when we are looking for uniformity?

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, on amendment A4, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen to speak.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. What a pleasure it is to be here with everyone tonight debating this amendment. It's actually very encouraging to hear the Minister of Education get up and speak at length to this amendment and how perhaps, in her opinion, it is redundant. In her opinion, it speaks to clauses that are already

addressed in the Education Act. That's why I look forward to the Education minister actually voting in favour of this as well, because if, in fact, it already is addressed in the Education Act, then the Education minister has nothing to be afraid of by voting for this amendment.

**An Hon. Member:** It's already there.

**Mr. Dang:** It would provide greater clarity for private schools.

**The Deputy Chair:** Through the chair, everyone.

**Mr. Dang:** It would provide greater clarity for boards and principals . . .

*7:40 p.m.*

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, I am speaking.

I was just going to remind the House that there is ample opportunity to debate not only this specific amendment but also the bill as a whole. I would encourage any members that would like to, who have perhaps a debatable position – after one or any other member speaks or debates on this, they are welcome to stand up at the appropriate time.

Please, hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course, certainly, if this is something that is so black and white and clear and already in the Education Act, then for greater clarity there is no harm in passing this amendment. If, in fact, the Education minister and her colleagues on the government bench decide that they don't wish to pass this amendment, then I have to assume that this introduces something they would not like to see in the Education Act. Whether that is just greater clarity or whether that is indeed making the private schools and those boards and principals comply with the Education Act and the provisions set out around GSAs and QSAs, then I think that that is something that we will be seeing very shortly as we vote on this amendment.

But I think it's very important that we address the core of why this amendment makes a bad bill better. We know that Bill Hate is a bad bill. We know it's a bill that goes after and attacks GSAs, we know it's a bill that attacks students, we know it's a bill that attacks our most vulnerable youth, and we know it was designed to do that and that it was really designed to destroy GSAs. But what we can see here is that the Minister of Education has gotten up and spoken at length about how she believes these provisions already exist and that these provisions are not necessary and that this amendment is a waste of time and that we should move on.

Well, I would then raise to the Education minister that if that is indeed the case and the Education minister would like members of the opposition to move on, for our sake and for greater clarity for this Assembly, for greater clarity for private schools, for greater clarity within the Education Act, there is absolutely no harm in passing this amendment. That is simple logic. If it's something that's already there and we add it again for clarity, then that's something that won't change anything in the act, but if we refuse to add that into the act, if we refuse to make those changes and actually identify that these GSA, QSA provisions must be applied to private schools, if the Education minister is actually opposed to that, then we will see very clearly that the Education minister and members of the government caucus here are actually perhaps not wanting to signal this to private schools, that they are not wanting to show in the Education Act, in black and white, with greater clarity, that these are important provisions, that these provisions are what will actually help save students' lives.

I think this is a very simple amendment. It's a very clear amendment. The minister knows very well that if indeed what she is saying is true, then there is no harm in passing this amendment. I challenge the minister to perhaps get up in this place, if what she just said was true and if she was not misleading this House and misleading Albertans, if what was just said was indeed true – I believe it was, Mr. Chair, because that is what she has presented to this House – and explain to this House what harm will come from passing this amendment and why passing this amendment is such an affront to the Education Act and such an affront to the government and such an affront to the minister's values.

That is something that all Albertans deserve to know. That is something that is very important as we move forward with this bill, that we debate issues in fulsome and in a fulsome way that allows us to actually address whether what the minister is saying is intended to just be signalling for Albertans or whether it's actually intended to work for gay students, gay-straight alliances, queer-straight alliances, and young vulnerable Albertans all across this province. It's something that is very important for us to be able to have clear in *Hansard*, here in the Assembly right now, Mr. Chair, because today we are spending our evening debating something that will affect the lives of thousands of students across this province.

Let me tell you, Mr. Chair, that the former Minister of Education, the Member for Edmonton-North West, spoke at length about how he learned a lot about Bill 10 both while it was being debated here in this House a few years ago and also while he was the minister. Let me tell you that when I was a student and Bill 10 was moving through this House, this was something that we absolutely heard about. This was something that as students we absolutely were concerned about. The current Minister of Education will remember that around the time of Bill 10 students were actually protesting in the streets. They were coming to the Legislature, and they were speaking at length about how important these GSA and QSA provisions were.

In fact, at that time – I actually remember, and I'll try to keep the details a little bit vague here for various reasons, Mr. Chair – there were students at private schools who came forward. They may not have come forward in the media, but they came forward at the rallies. They came forward to our friend groups. They came forward and spoke to people that were at the GSA at my high school. One of the things that I heard very clearly was that at these private schools these principals and boards in many cases would drag their feet, would make it impossible to start a GSA, effectively would make it impossible to call a GSA a GSA or a QSA and that, in fact, it led many of these students to having thoughts that perhaps would lead to depression, suicide, or other things like that.

What has become very clear is that this minister and this government either do not understand or do not care about what those ramifications will be. They either do not understand or do not care what those students are going through, and that is something that's a real shame. It's a real shame to see the associate minister of mental health sitting here and refusing to speak to this and to speak to how GSAs and QSAs, especially having them in accredited private schools, would improve the mental health of students. It's a shame to see the minister not stand up here and understand why having these provisions is important and why having these provisions actually protects students, making sure that we make it extremely clear that every single school, whether they are public, separate, charter, or accredited private, must have the same rules.

If the minister is correct and indeed this is something that already exists in the act, then the minister should be very happy to vote this through. The minister should be very happy to say, "Well, we should reaffirm what's already in the act," because if the minister's act is so good and the minister believes her act is the be-all and end-

all for education for the next hundred years here in Alberta, then we should reaffirm what's already in the act by passing this amendment. I look forward to seeing the minister speak to that and speak to how she'll be supporting this amendment and how her government colleagues will be supporting this amendment because it is something that is very simple. If it's true, if the minister was not misleading us here in this Assembly and was not misleading Albertans, then it would be simple to pass this amendment. It would be simple to accept this amendment. It would be simple to recognize that it provides greater clarity. That's something that I don't believe the minister is going to get up and do, Mr. Chair.

I'll say that again. If the minister is not misleading this House, then indeed she will get up and say that. I really do believe that if she is correct, then we need to move forward and accept that this greater clarity for private schools is required, is good, and is something that we should be signalling for Albertans. We should be trying to protect our youngest and most vulnerable Albertans. It's something we should recognize, that these inclusion groups, as the minister likes to call them, need the most clarity possible. We have seen time and time again, wherever there was an opening, that certain school districts and certain school boards or administrators perhaps did not believe in the value of inclusion groups, as the minister calls them, or GSAs or QSAs, perhaps did not understand. Perhaps they had ties to conversion therapy schools such as the school that the Minister of Finance was on the board for. Perhaps they just didn't understand that gay kids mattered, Mr. Chair, but that's not for us here in this Assembly to decide.

What is for us in this Assembly to decide is that if this is indeed an amendment that makes no tangible difference, then the minister should have no problem accepting that. That is something that all members of this Assembly should agree with. I would challenge members of the government caucus and members of the government front bench to perhaps ask the minister, because this is a really interesting question. If indeed it is already in the act, then what is the harm in making it more clear? What is the harm in ensuring that the act is followed to its fullest? Or is the intent for there to be a way for the act to not be followed? Is the intent of the act to be unclear in certain aspects, to be muddy in certain aspects so that administrators can drag their feet and perhaps not provide GSAs and QSAs?

If that is indeed the case, then the minister should get up in this House and say that. The minister should explain to Albertans, explain to this Assembly why she refuses to accept this amendment even though it allegedly does nothing new and allegedly already exists in the act. That's something that I think is very important because it's something that all Albertans are going to be interested in. It's going to be interesting to Albertans to be able to understand whether this government will actually walk the walk or whether they will only talk the talk.

This amendment, that makes accredited private schools comply with the same principles and the same rules as every other school that the minister has spoken to already, is simply common sense. It's simply common sense that when you publicly fund an institution, when students are under the care of the minister, when students are under the care of the government, that this Legislature was sent here to hold to account, they have the same rules across the entire province. It makes sense that they have the same protections across the entire province. It shouldn't matter whether you go to school in Lethbridge, in Drumheller, in Edmonton, in Calgary, or in High Level. It really shouldn't matter where you go to school, Mr. Chair. As long as you are in a publicly funded institution, you have the exact same rules.

7:50 p.m.

Greater clarity: this amendment would provide that. It would provide the clarity that all of our schools must comply with the Education Act, especially regarding GSAs, QSAs, and so-called inclusion groups, Mr. Chair. I think it's very clear that this is a simple amendment. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I know, understands how important this amendment is. That's why she moved it. She understands how critical it is that we send this out as a message to students across the province, that they will be protected even if they attend a private school, not only if they attend public or separate or charter schools.

We did see, Mr. Chair, that when the original Bill 24 was moved through, compliance was found with all public schools, all charter schools, all separate schools. We did see some private schools not comply with the act, and Bill 24 was quite clear already that all schools must comply. I believe, actually, that Bill 8 and the Education Act are less clear than Bill 24. Because Bill 8 and the Education Act are less clear, I think that this amendment makes it more clear for those schools that if they don't comply, they must face the consequences.

That is something that I would hope the minister would agree with. I would hope that the minister would agree that school boards should follow the law, that school boards should follow what is in her own Education Act, that she is charged to uphold. I would hope that the minister would do that, and I would think that this amendment would actually enable the minister to do that in a more unified and simple way. It's something that the minister should be happy to have as an extra tool in her tool box. The minister should be happy to have this as something that she will be able to hold up and say: private schools absolutely have to comply with the law as long as they are receiving public funds. As long as they receive that 70 per cent funding through the Education Act and the Alberta Education department, they absolutely must comply with the law.

That's something that I think is very simple. I think this amendment makes it more clear. The minister has said that she already believes that she has that authority. If she does indeed have that authority and if she does believe that, then I don't understand why she wouldn't support this amendment – this amendment would give her another tool in her tool box – unless the minister intends to not have school boards comply with the law, unless the minister is deliberately objecting to this amendment because she does not believe the law should be followed, unless she deliberately objects to this amendment because she believes it would hold her to upholding the law against all private schools.

That's something that I think this House deserves to understand, Mr. Chair. This House deserves to understand whether the minister intends to actually uphold the law as it's written, and this amendment would provide that clarity for Albertans. This amendment would allow Albertans to understand what this government is actually doing, whether they walk the walk or just talk the talk.

Mr. Chair, I know that the minister understands how important these GSAs and QSAs are. We have been in here for many hours over many days debating the importance of GSAs and QSAs. Members of the opposition have spoken at length . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but having given some thought for the last couple of moments, I just want to caution the member with regard to potentially imputing a false motive with regard to other members in the House. I would just ask him to be cautious with his language.

Having made that request, I would ask the hon. member to continue.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course, I would never impute a motive to another member. All I would say is that members' actions and ministers' actions as they work here in the House and the government's actions show very clearly what Albertans should expect and how they should feel about what the government is doing. Of course, every single member of this Assembly has the opportunity to rise in this place and speak to what they believe. I believe that if they don't, then Albertans will have to make their own decisions on what the motives of these members are, and that is something that's very concerning.

When we look at accredited private schools, they receive 70 per cent funding. That is a very large amount of their funding. They should stand with the law. The government needs to understand and the government needs to tell Albertans whether they intend to uphold the law to the same standard for every single school and every single administrator across this entire province or whether they intend to let certain schools sort of slip by, Mr. Chair. I think this amendment prevents that.

If the government does not wish to pass this amendment, an amendment that they have already indicated is redundant and would only give them the same tools that they already have, then perhaps it signals that the government doesn't intend to uphold the law for every single school. Perhaps it signals that the government and certain ministers do not intend to do that, and that's something that I think would be very bad for this province. I think it would be very bad for our education system across this province. Most of all, Mr. Chair, I think that it would be bad for students across this province and, in particular, gay students and queer students. That is something that I think every single member of this Assembly should be concerned about. We should be concerned about how certain schools have been known to drag their feet in the past and indeed have had alumni come forward and students come forward and explain to the public how they were shamed for being gay, shamed for being lesbian, how they were almost forced to go to conversion therapy camps in some cases. In these schools we want to make sure that all of the provisions of the act are going to be followed.

If that is indeed the intent of this government, then it would be very simple for this government to accept this amendment. It would be very simple for this government to allow the amendment to provide greater clarity and guidance for the minister and for these schools. If indeed it does nothing that the minister isn't already intending to do, then the minister should absolutely accept the amendment and tell Albertans that she intends to do this and that she intends to hold these school boards and these private schools to the law. That's something that I think this minister should be proud to do. She should be proud to recognize that the Education Act can be made more clear and that she can be given more tools to do her job, Mr. Chair. I think that, very clearly, this is her job, to make sure that the Education Act is followed properly.

This is something that I think all Albertans should be able to support and that all members of this Assembly should be able to support. It's something that I think I'm very happy to support. I'm very happy to be able to see and understand the importance of it. I mean, it's a shame that the government doesn't understand how important these GSAs and QSAs are. It's a shame that they either don't understand or don't care about these GSAs and QSAs. I think that, certainly, if we're seeing compliance under Bill 24 for all public, separate, and charter schools, it is only a small change to ensure that the private accredited schools are also complying with the Education Act. It's a short amendment, Mr. Chair. I'd encourage

the members of the government caucus to read it and understand how simple it is to protect vulnerable youth. If they do indeed believe in protecting vulnerable youth, they would understand why it's so important and that it doesn't infringe on anyone's rights, doesn't infringe on anybody's beliefs. All it does is say that you must provide a safe space for these students who request it.

That's something where if we're funding these schools at 70 per cent, then absolutely these schools should be able to comply with the law. They should be able to comply with the amendment. If indeed they are already complying with the law, then they would also be complying with the amendment. I think the Education minister knows that, and the Education minister should be happy to be able to support that. It's something that I think is very clear here in this House.

The Education minister has been making faces and gestures as if saying: well, of course it's redundant. Well, if, of course, it's redundant, then of course we should be able to pass it. It's simple logic, Mr. Chair. It would do nothing that the minister isn't already doing. If indeed she does not wish to do her job, then she would not pass this amendment.

It is very clear what this government is intending. It's to allow certain schools and certain boards to skirt the rules, to not comply with the Education Act, and to not allow these GSAs, these QSAs, and for gay students to have a safe space to be in compliance with.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, to speak to A4, I believe I see that the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to rise and talk. I guess we are now well over 24 hours of what is still Wednesday inside this place. I believe we passed the record for the longest sitting day probably about 15 or so minutes ago. I think you have to ask yourself why. If I was an average Albertan watching on the Internet what has been taking place in this place for a very long time, I certainly would be asking myself: why? Heck, I've been in this place for a while, and I'm still asking myself why at this exact moment.

*8:00 p.m.*

Interestingly enough, Mr. Chair, nobody is watching us on the Internet except for maybe a couple of people in the building. We know that nobody is listening to the opposition in this Chamber except for us because that's our role on behalf of Albertans. Sometimes everybody has a cross to bear, so we're here listening to what they have to say. That's our responsibility, to come and listen as best we can though sometimes it's harder than others.

But I don't think you would be at fault, if you were a constituent watching tonight what their MLA was doing in the Chamber, what they were talking about, in being a little bit frustrated, at the very least, with the inability of the opposition to do any research when it comes to this legislation. Now, Mr. Chair, they may be struggling with staff as they transition to opposition. I know there are rumours going around about different volunteer positions and that type of stuff. I don't know if that is what's impacting the research ability of the opposition. You know, I won't make that assumption. Maybe it's possible. I don't know.

To come into the Chamber and then spend hours asking the Education minister to rise and address a question and then when the Education minister rises and addresses the exact question that you asked and points out that your amendment, what you're asking for in the amendment, already exists and that your amendment would be redundant, to have the nerve to then rise after the hon. the Education minister articulates that, makes it very clear, very politely takes you through what you've missed – and people miss

things. It's a big, big bill, and people miss things. After it being pointed out that what you have brought to this Chamber already exists, to then have the nerve and the gall to stand up in this place and attack the very same minister again and to ask the very same question again about your amendment is bizarre. It's bizarre, Mr. Chair, and that's what people, if they were watching this at the moment, are thinking: what the heck is going on with Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition?

Now, Mr. Chair, through you to those who may be watching, I wish I could answer that, but I have no idea what is going on with Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. I suspect that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has no idea what is going on with them. It's pretty clear that it's chaos over inside the opposition benches right now. I suspect that has a lot to do with the upcoming leadership race that is going to happen inside the NDP corridors as they spend their time trying to reposition to get ready for the leadership race. I don't know if there are, you know, already attempts to remove the interim leader of the NDP or what is going on inside the NDP caucus, but it's pretty clear that a lot of this is about posturing because it's certainly not about the bill.

If it was about the bill, they would actually come to this Chamber and talk about what's inside the bill, and they wouldn't bring ridiculous amendments that are already inside the legislation to the Chamber. Now, that also may be because they're running out of options, Mr. Chair, at this point. They continue to come to this Chamber and filibuster the progress that Albertans expect to happen inside this Chamber with ridiculous amendments that have already been put in the bill.

Now, Mr. Chair, talk about not being able to take yes as an answer. The hon. member rose and asked a question, got the answer, confirmed that what they wanted is already inside the legislation. Problem solved. What he should have done was gotten up and said: "Well, thank you, Minister. I'm sorry I got this one wrong. In fact, I'm going to go back and question whether or not my researchers are capable of handling what is coming on and maybe get them to adjust." I don't know. Maybe in their volunteer roles they're struggling at the moment – I don't know – just with time. We want to respect that fact with their role. But they got it wrong, and that's okay. Things like that happen.

I think it's important for the House to begin to start to ask as amendments like these come forward in this Chamber: "What is the Official Opposition trying to do with an amendment that already exists inside the very piece of legislation that the Education minister brought to the Chamber? Does that benefit Albertans?" There was a lot of talk by the hon. member, while he'd said that he was speaking to his amendment or his colleague's amendment, about the benefit for the province of Alberta. Is it really beneficial for the province of Alberta that the Official Opposition for hours and hours and hours inside this Chamber repeatedly gets up and talks about things that are already existing in the bill?

At the very least, Mr. Chair, could they be a little bit more creative than that and come up with another piece of legislation, not come up with an amendment that already exists inside the legislation? I mean, I know some of the hon. members across the way. They're capable of coming up with an amendment. One of them is the former Deputy Chair of Committees inside this place, very capable when it comes to things like this. I'm sure that she wouldn't want to see her colleagues continue to come and bring amendments to this Chamber that already exist in the legislation.

Mr. Chair, I was talking about this earlier with some of my colleagues. It costs a significant amount of taxpayer resources for this Chamber to operate. Now, it's important that this Chamber operates. It does an important role. It's important to our

parliamentary system in our country, and we need to make sure that that happens, but we need to respect the time that we have in the Chamber. The Official Opposition coming here into this House and bringing in amendments that already exist is certainly not – I would submit to you, Mr. Chair, that this is relevant to this amendment because it's not respecting this Chamber. When you find out that you already have it in there and you can't take yes for an answer, when you're so stuck in your partisan lens that you're not able to rise and go, "Oh, okay; cool; we got that one done; perfect; tick that box off" and then come with another amendment to continue to try to make the legislation stronger – the Official Opposition seems incapable of being able to do that.

It's one of the things that I find disappointing. Particularly with parties, you see it often when they're dealing with leadership crises, like the Official Opposition is dealing with. They struggle to do their role in here. One of the things I was proud of when we were the Official Opposition in this Chamber, both with the Wildrose Party, which I had the privilege being part of, and, second, in the United Conservative Party, as we went through our process of uniting the free-enterprise conservative movement in this province, a historical moment that I'm proud to be part of, going through the full unity vote to accomplish that, two leadership races that had to happen at the same time, we were still able to come to this place and do our job as the Official Opposition every day. If we could do that during all of that process to be able to get the free-enterprise side of Alberta's political spectrum united, certainly the Official Opposition could do that as they go through their leadership review of their one-term Premier as their members begin to posture to run for the leadership.

Now, I would also submit to you, Mr. Chair, that bringing amendments like this would not help with your leadership run. I mean, I don't have an NDP membership. That may come as a surprise to you, but if I was an NDP member and I was starting to look at the slate of possible candidates to replace the former Premier of Alberta when whatever happens with the chaos of leadership in the NDP is over, I don't think I'd want to vote for somebody who continues to bring amendments to the Chamber that already exist inside the legislation, that would waste that much time inside this Chamber, or would not understand the legislation that they were debating. That's not somebody that I would want to lead my party and to be the next Leader of the Official Opposition inside this Chamber.

I see the former Education minister heckling away. I very much suspect that he may run to be the next Leader of the Official Opposition. In fact, Mr. Chair, I believe that he may have run before in the past and was not successful, but maybe he will be successful this time, and maybe I could provide him some free advice through you, Mr. Chair. It's probably better if he spends his time actually sticking up for Albertans, defending what his constituents want, actually listening to what Albertans want, not coming here and spending his time trying to make an amendment to legislation that says exactly what the legislation already said. I don't think that would be very good for a leadership race.

Now, I've never run for leader of a party. My friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow ran once for leadership of the party. He did a great job, ran an excellent campaign. I was on a different campaign, but we were great friends. And I could tell you that he would, through you, Mr. Chair, provide advice to the former Education minister – and I'm saying that because I can't remember his constituency at the moment – that that's probably not the best way to begin to launch your leadership race.

**An Hon. Member:** What did the NDP members in Sundre say?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. The NDP members in Sundre – and I suspect that there are a couple of them – certainly would not like this. Now, maybe they would be interested in the former Education minister as a potential leader, but I think that they are losing interest when he spends his time inside this Legislature focusing on amendments like this that are already inside the existing legislation. It's just counterproductive.

*8:10 p.m.*

While it's fun to hang out here and I love it – you know why, Mr. Chair? I love to be here all the time because we have the greatest caucus, in my belief, in the history of this Legislature. I'm happy to hang out here all day with my colleagues, spend our time together, being able to sit inside the Legislature, be able to absorb the history of the moment of this Chamber, and I'm happy to do it all day. I will come and hang out with my caucus any day of the week inside this Chamber, 24 hours a day, 48 hours, whatever, straight. I'm excited to do that.

It's just really important, though, I think, for us to continue to encourage our colleagues – they are our colleagues, who have an important constitutional responsibility in this Chamber as the Official Opposition – to do better. Their job is to encourage us to get better legislation, and they're trying to do that. They're struggling. I suspect that a lot of that's about the leadership turmoil inside their party, but we have a job, too, as their colleagues, to encourage them. I'm just trying to encourage them, Mr. Chair, through you, to do better with their amendments, to take yes for an answer, to try to actually change legislation, to maybe take time to read the bill before you come to the Legislature. That's something I would suggest to do. Maybe then you would be able to rise inside this Chamber and actually talk about the bill.

Here's another thing. At the very least, if you don't have time, Mr. Chair, to speak about the bill, read the amendment that you brought to the Chamber. That would help. It's your amendment, and you continue to rise inside this House and talk about an amendment and, clearly, speech after speech, have no clue what's in the amendment. If you want to support your colleagues – at the very least, if you're the one that moves the amendment, you should take the time to read the amendment. That certainly hasn't happened inside this Chamber of late. It's pretty obvious, when you listen to the comments of the hon. members opposite, that they haven't even read their own amendments. They're just standing up, going off their talking points.

I don't know. Maybe it's the whip. The former Education minister is now the whip. I got the privilege of being the chief opposition whip in this place before, a tough job sometimes. I'm sure he's doing a good job, especially with the turmoil in leadership. It's really hard to be a whip when everybody in your caucus is positioning yourself to be the next Leader of the Opposition. So, you know, I sympathize with him, but he still has a responsibility to make sure his caucus actually brings amendments to this place that make sense, certainly that don't say the same thing that's already in the legislation.

Now, Mr. Chair, I've been in this Chamber. I've moved a lot of amendments myself inside this Chamber over the years, so it's possible that we may have come here before with an amendment that was already in the legislation and we missed it. Some of these bills are big, and they're coming fast and furious, but once it happens and the hon. Education minister shows you word for word that your amendment already exists in the legislation, I would have certainly got up on that side and said: "Government, great job. You got that one right. Let's move on, and let's get another amendment on the floor."

You know what's happened, Mr. Chair? They've run out of amendments. Now they're having to go in and actually pull pieces of our actual legislation and try to amend it word for word, the same as is already in the legislation. I have never heard of such a thing in all of my time in the Chamber. I don't know if some of my colleagues that were here in the Official Opposition with me ever recall us having to use that kind of a tactic, but then again we never sat inside this House for 24, 26, 27 hours at a time filibustering on the taxpayer's dime legislation that they voted for in overwhelming numbers to be passed.

It's a new approach to the leadership race. It's the way they've got to go. I know the Official Opposition leader at this point has to be thinking: wow; my entire caucus at this point appears to be getting ready to run for my job, that I haven't even vacated yet, and is spending their time, 24 hours a day, inside the Legislature positioning themselves for a run for the NDP leadership. Well, Mr. Chair, I don't know why you'd want to run for the leadership of that party if these are the tactics that this party is going to take. You know where that party is headed to with these tactics? They're headed right back to being the third party or maybe not even a party inside this Chamber, because Albertans are not going to accept this behaviour from this Official Opposition, nor should they.

They should expect better from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. I certainly expect better from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. I know my constituents do, Mr. Chair. I know their constituents do. Continuing to come to this place with amendments that are clearly already in legislation, continuing to give speeches that are clearly not about the legislation, and going through that process to delay what Albertans want is shameful, and each one of those members of that Official Opposition should hang their heads in shame. They should do better, and it's completely and utterly not acceptable.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen to speak.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Oh, what a pleasure it always is to hear from the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks here, and it's always great to see his energy here in this Chamber. It would just be nice if he was correct. Unfortunately, the minister has spent quite a bit of time here lecturing the opposition and other members about how it is so important to ensure that you read the amendment, read the bill, make sure everything you get is absolutely tip-top and that you are one hundred per cent right when you get up and talk to an amendment, that you are going to have your ducks in a row.

It's actually really unfortunate because I have the Education Act in front of me, Mr. Chair, and I'm sure the Education minister did earlier as well. Section 30(1)(d) of the Education Act:

In Part 3, sections 31, 32 and 35.1, section 42, except subsection (3), in respect of appeals referred to in section 58.2, and Division 7.

You'll actually note, Mr. Chair, that at no point in that excerpt I just read from the Education Act was section 33(1)(d), (2) and (3), referred to at all. Section 33 is actually not referred to in the application of the act to private schools in the Education Act. Now, I understand that the Minister of Environment and Parks and the Minister of Education both spoke at length in this Assembly as to how they believed that this was a redundant amendment, but it's right here in black and white. You can see it yourself in the act and in the amendment that there are clauses in this amendment that are not addressed in the Education Act. It's very simple.

I know the ministers were not intending to mislead this House, but they certainly were incorrect in their assessment. They were incorrect. I understand that in transitioning into government,

sometimes it's hard to bring staff in. Especially if they're coming in from Ottawa and don't understand all of the Alberta legislation, especially if they haven't seen the scene in Alberta for the last several years, they'll have a tough time reading the act, Mr. Chair. But I assure you that it's on page – I believe the minister said that it was page 37 of the act. It's page 35 in the numbered pages, page 37 on the PDF. If they're frantically looking this up in the gallery right now, I'm sure they can look that up using the search function on their phones or keyboards, control F, to help them out at home. It becomes very clear that the Minister of Education and the Minister of Environment and Parks are wrong. They simply did not read the amendment. They did not read the act. They trusted a briefing note that came from a staffer from Ottawa that was wrong, and that's a shame.

It's something where I think, as the Minister of Environment and Parks and Government House Leader has spoken eloquently to just now, we should expect better in this House. We should expect members to not go off on tangents and speak at length to things that they don't understand and that would be embarrassing for members, as the minister had said already. I mean, I would be embarrassed if I'd actually just missed the whole number on the page that was right in front of me in black and white. That would embarrass me, Mr. Chair. But, luckily, I'm able to pull it up online here and look at the actual Education Act and look at the actual amendment and do the research that a member of this House should do as their job and actually understand the depth of the amendment and how it affects the legislation and how it affects Bill 8 and the Education Act. I hope every member is now doing that research. I hope every government member is now taking the time to take a step away from the rhetoric and, as the Government House Leader would say, away from the talking points and perhaps actually read the amendment and the legislation.

I assure you that when I sat in the government caucus, I also received numerous briefing notes and numerous binders full of documents, Mr. Chair, and I'm sure you've seen those documents now as well. But sometimes you actually have to go and read the bill. Sometimes you actually have to do your job and look into the things you're voting on. Sometimes you discover that the briefing note omits, in this case, section 33(1)(d), (2) and (3). In fact, the briefing note has no mention of it at all, and in fact their talking points have no mention of it at all, but the bill, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, Bill 8, and this amendment do. This amendment does address those sections.

This amendment is not redundant no matter what the Minister of Education would have you believe. This amendment is not superfluous no matter what the Minister of Environment and Parks and Government House Leader would have you believe. Indeed, it would be embarrassing if I missed that in my note, and it would be embarrassing if I missed that in my overview of the Education Act. But, unfortunately, that is the case. We've seen it now. It's clear. The facts are before us if we read the bills ourselves.

I would encourage the minister, then, now that she has spoken to how she believes that all these clauses that are in this amendment are already protected and now that we've shown her in black and white that they're not – I'm looking forward to the minister voting in favour of this amendment. The minister already spoke to how she supported this amendment in principle, to how it's supported already in the Education Act, to how she already believed that all these clauses were both important and already existent. We've now shown and proven that they are not existent.

So I hope the minister will vote in favour of this. I look forward to hearing more rigorous debate from the government side.

Thank you.

8:20 p.m.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, the individual who caught my eye was the hon. Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I would categorically disagree with the hon. member in his recent statements. If you look at Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, which we are introducing, on page 6 section 30 is amended by adding the following after subsection (1):

(1.1) Section 33(1)(d,) (2) and (3) apply.

Those are the sections that we're adding to what I had previously read under section 30(1), which included all the other pieces. This actually strengthens the legislation concerning private schools, that was not in the previous School Act.

The pieces that now will apply to private schools also include:

- (d) ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

As well:

- (2) A board shall establish, implement and maintain a policy respecting the board's obligation under subsection (1)(d) to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour.

And all of section (3):

- (3) A code of conduct established under subsection (2) must
  - (a) be made publicly available,
  - (b) be reviewed every year,
  - (c) be provided to all staff of the board, students of the board and parents of students of the board,
  - (d) contain the following elements:
    - (i) a statement of purpose that provides a rationale for the code of conduct, with a focus on welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments;
    - (ii) one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the Alberta Human Rights Act;
    - (iii) one or more statements about what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the school day or by electronic means;
    - (iv) one or more statements about the consequences of unacceptable behaviour, which must take account of the student's age, maturity and individual circumstances, and which must ensure that support is provided for students who are impacted by inappropriate behaviour, as well as for students who engage in inappropriate behaviour,

and

- (e) be in accordance with any further requirements established by the Minister by order.

This actually strengthens. This was not in the School Act. This is something that we now have put into the Education Act, included as an amended piece. That is why it is under section 8, page 6, adding (1.1) to what was already there in (1), which I had previously read, which did include 35.1 under (d) of 30(1).

Again, I do believe we have covered all the bases. As I've indicated before, we will have the most comprehensive statutory protections for GSAs, QSAs, inclusion groups. We are looking after all students in all environments, including private schools.

I do feel that the hon. member misspoke just previously. I will leave it at that.

**The Deputy Chair:** Any others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West rising to speak to amendment A4.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak on amendment A4. I mean, I'm happy to hear the Education minister's analysis. I guess the one part that I was a little bit unclear about was whether a private school was compelled to have a safe and caring schools policy in the window, so to speak – right? – up front for people to see. I think I heard that you said that that was so here now. In other words, through the chair, of course, the private school is compelled to have a safe and caring schools policy posted as such on their website or as part of their documentation, as part of their information. It sounded like you said that it did. Your head is going up and down, and your hand is going up. There you go. That's good. I mean, that's the one part that we were concerned about, quite frankly. You know, that seems sort of reasonable, and that's great.

You know, as part of the debate, I must say that that's my job. I think that in this Chamber and in life in general I am the person that brings things down a little bit, brings the temperature down. Our job is to provide constructive criticism, right? I think that we have been doing so, and we do through amendments as well. I think that what I heard from the hon. minister seems to satisfy the concern that I had in this regard, and that's great. We have to look for those things whenever we can. I mean, I know that the hon. minister and myself worked together very closely for quite a number of years, actually, and we always had a really good relationship. I certainly respect the integrity of her analysis, on this amendment anyway, so that's great.

I don't think we need to take it to a vote, then, as such. Do you want to do that?

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

**Ms Sweet:** We still have to vote on it.

**Mr. Eggen:** We still have to vote on it. Okay. Great. I will leave it at that.

Oh, my gosh, Mr. Chair. You look even better than you did a minute ago. There you go.

I will leave it at that. Thank you very much.

**The Acting Chair:** Anyone else to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

**The Acting Chair:** Any further discussion on the bill? The Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Yes. Excellent. For all the recently elected members, you know, that's democracy in action, and there's nothing wrong with it, quite frankly, right? I can't remember, really, having an amendment that kind of fizzled out before, but there you go. We can chock it up to experience.

However, Mr. Chair, certainly, that doesn't deter a diligent member from constructive criticism of an important bill. What I would like to do now is pass out an amendment that I have here that I think you all will find of great interest.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. We can proceed if you like. This will be referred to as amendment A5.

**Mr. Eggen:** Okay. Great. Maybe while we're passing them out, I can just, with the chair's permission, read the amendment. Is that okay?

**The Acting Chair:** You would be moving it on behalf of . . .

**Mr. Eggen:** . . . the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Eggen:** Yes, indeed. I'll just read it while we're passing it out. Is that okay, Mr. Chair?

**The Acting Chair:** Go ahead.

*8:30 p.m.*

**Mr. Eggen:** Okay. I'll read it. Moved that Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, be amended by striking out section 10 and substituting the following: section 33 is amended (a) in subsection (1)(e) by striking out "specialized"; (b) by adding the following after subsection (2):

(2.1) A policy established under subsection (2) must contain a requirement that any request made by a student pursuant to section 35.1(1) is granted no more than two weeks from the day the request is received.

I'll wait for that to get passed.

**The Acting Chair:** Anyone else to speak to amendment A5?

**Mr. Eggen:** I'm going to speak.

**The Acting Chair:** Sure. Go ahead.

**Mr. Eggen:** I was just going to wait to have it all passed out. Should I move ahead then?

**The Acting Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Eggen:** Okay. Great. Thank you. This amendment, I think, speaks directly to the timeliness of a school or school board instituting a GSA or QSA if requested by students in a school. Again, you know, I've said it before, but I'll say it very briefly again. This is one of the practical things that I ran across in the last few years, where if somehow a school was reluctant to start a GSA, then they would just kind of hold back or rag the puck on actually instituting it in a timely way.

Just to put it in context, remember that we're talking about kids that are, like, 15, 16, 17 years old, so they're dealing with adults. They're already in a compromised situation and feeling like if they're not getting a response from the administration, then it's awkward. You know, we did see examples where schools or school boards would just not respond and then just kind of wait for it to go away somehow. Again, that's, I think, behaviour that runs counter to the intention of creating a GSA and having a safe and caring environment and the confidence that a student can have to go to a school or a principal, which is not easy to do anyway – I know that takes some bravery or some presence of mind for a young kid to do so – and then to make sure that they're being answered in a timely way to create the GSA or the QSA.

This is one of the things that I did address in Bill 24, and this is something that I believe, you know, we can put into this Education Amendment Act. It's a very simple amendment, I think. It's pretty darn clear, and I would encourage everyone to absorb it, think about it, and hopefully consider supporting this amendment.

I believe that it's incumbent upon us in this Assembly to act on experience, to act on what we have seen to be true; in this case, like I say, the experiences that I did have as minister with a not timely

response to the request for a GSA or a QSA. I did address it by the bill that I had brought forward previously, and I think that it would really rest well in this current bill and would go a long way to helping kids know that this law and regulation are in place to help them and not hinder them.

I encourage everybody to think about this and support it. I'm sure we'll have some people to make some comment on it, and I appreciate, Mr. Chair, your time to bring this amendment forward.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank my hon. friend from Edmonton-North West. He absolutely delivered on his promise to bring the temperature down in the Legislature. He restored it to its otherwise soporific state, so thank you to the Member for Edmonton-North West for bringing the temperature down. I also want to thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton-South. He continues to impress me with the number of words per minute that he manages to make in his speeches. On an efficiency basis I think there is no other member of the Legislature who delivers more product to his constituents than the Member for Edmonton-South. I want to thank him for setting the bar so high.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order, Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** A point of order has been called.

#### Point of Order Relevance

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you. I rise on 23(b)(i). "A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion [or the chair's], that Member speaks to [a matter] other than the question under discussion." I would also point out (c). Actually, I'll just stick with (b) for the time being.

While I'm very interested, I'm sure, in the hon. member's opinion of his colleague, I'm not sure what it has to do with the amendment that was just brought forward in this Chamber. I like lots of my colleagues. I like all of my colleagues, actually. All of them are here. Mr. Chair, I could spend some time talking about the hon. Minister of Health. For many years I've known him. He's a good friend. I could talk about how great he is. How about the hon. the Finance minister? Nice guy. I could talk about that in great detail. I don't know what that has to do with this amendment though. Pretty clear in the standing orders that he should be called to order and get focused back on this amendment.

**The Acting Chair:** The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I find this a little ironic when the member just started speaking, so there wasn't a lot of time to get to where he was starting to go. However, not only a few minutes ago the hon. House leader just stood up and waxed on for, like, 15 minutes about an amendment and how great his caucus is and all of the other things that he was loudly talking about during his comments around the previous amendment. I think that, you know, there's some – yes, we'll just say that it's ironic and maybe just say that it's not a point of order at this point.

**The Acting Chair:** To rule, I do not believe this is a point of order, but I do encourage all members to stay focused on the business at hand. We have amendment A5.

Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, if you wish to continue.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I will certainly endeavour to do my best to speak to the amendment before us. I understand that you didn't find that that was a point of order, but I certainly do want to make sure that we remain focused on what's going on. I'm pleased to stand and support my hon. friend from Edmonton-North West in bringing forward this amendment on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I think it's important for everybody to support this amendment because it sets up strict timelines for achieving the formation of GSAs.

Certainly, you know, I recall, Mr. Chair, as I'm sure you do, a number of occasions when the members opposite were in the Official Opposition and they were asking about timelines for delivering on things that we had promised. They would bring forward amendments that would require timelines for reporting on things that were enacted in legislation, certainly asked often for timelines on other things that weren't related to legislation but were important policy pieces that we had committed to deliver.

In fact, I would agree with the members opposite when they demand timelines for achieving objectives that people have promised to make because that's really the only way that we know that there is a commitment to that promise. You can set a measurable date, and if it's not achieved by that date, then you know that perhaps the promise was hollow in the beginning or you can identify what some of the reasons are that the promise wasn't fulfilled, but you can then use that deadline, if it hasn't been met, to recommit yourself to achieving the original objective.

*8:40 p.m.*

That's what we have here in this amendment. I appreciate the Member for Red Deer-North. She clarified for us in the debate around the last amendment that she believes that all public, charter, and private schools should have policies that include the formation of GSAs, so she has made a promise to the students of Alberta that if they come forward and request a GSA, they have the right to get one. It's only fair to then make sure that they set a deadline to make good on that promise, Mr. Chair. That's what we have here in this amendment, that once a GSA has been requested by any student at a public, charter, or private school, that school has a two-week deadline to go through the process and facilitate the formation of a GSA.

I certainly hope that all of the members opposite who have been in this Legislature for longer than the current session, longer than the current Legislature, reflect back on the times that they requested timelines from us on a number of policy and legislative matters and certainly recall the reasons that they had asked for those timelines and then see if those reasons for requesting those timelines apply in this case. I'm certain, Mr. Chair, that they would agree that it's fundamentally important to have a timeline in place for the formation of a GSA.

You know, it's a time-honoured tradition, speaking as a parent of a way – it's easy to placate children – to appear to give in to their demands but then never give them a deadline for meeting that demand. I have an eight-year-old son, Mr. Chair, and he often nags me to buy him video games, and oftentimes the requests become so troublesome and tiring that I will just tell him that I will get him a video game, but I never commit to actually delivering that video game on a specific date. I'm sure that many of the parents here in this Chamber have experienced something similar, that they have promised their children to give them something that they want in the moment in the hopes that, you know, once that moment has passed, the children will forget the request, and the parents can get

away with not delivering on that commitment, that they made just to placate their children.

I can say that without imposing firm timelines on delivering on the formation of GSAs, I think, then the government is saying that that's how we're going to placate the students in our schools, that, you know, they're just throwing a temper tantrum or they're being unreasonable. They really don't know what they want in the moment, so we'll placate them and say, "Yes, a GSA is coming," but without a specific date they can continue to say that the GSA is on its way, and that will always be true, but they actually have no intent to deliver. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that the students won't buy it. They know, probably from having parents like me, that promising to deliver something without setting a specific deadline is just a way to placate them and move through the moment and hope that the request will disappear.

Certainly, a lot of students have been through this process. The former Minister of Education, my friend from Edmonton-North West, spoke of some examples, that he saw when he was Minister of Education, of schools giving students the runaround. They would make empty promises of delivering on the formation of GSAs, but the students would have to make a request, and then the request was, you know, in theory granted, but time would pass, and nothing would happen. Of course, once the kids realized that, hey, maybe this GSA isn't coming, they would make the request again and repeat the entire experience.

You know, I hope that the members opposite have the courage of their convictions, that they actually signal to school boards and charter schools and private schools that they're serious about making sure the kids have access to gay-straight alliances and impose this deadline, a perfectly reasonable deadline, I might add. Certainly, a two-week time frame is enough time, I would say, to allow for the formation of a GSA, and given the fact that school is short – the school year is only 10 months – and that kids move through that time very quickly, a two-week time frame is a reasonable time. It balances the needs of principals and administration to put the staff and resources in place to deliver on GSAs. It also balances the need for students to have relatively quick access to gay-straight alliances to make their schools safe and welcoming places.

I certainly hope that all of my colleagues here in the Legislature honour the commitment that they are making to the students of Alberta. They have made a promise in this legislation and certainly through all of the statements around GSAs that they've made in the House that students will have access to GSAs, but now it's time to put some clear parameters on when students can expect those GSAs to arrive once they've made the request.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will encourage all of my colleagues to vote in favour of this amendment.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

I see the Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It gives me pleasure to rise to speak to this amendment as well, which I believe is a pretty straightforward amendment which recognizes a deficiency in the legislation brought forward by the government and which I hope the government accepts readily and implements. I don't believe it was an oversight on the part of the government to avoid putting a deadline in their proposal where a request is brought forward by a student to establish a GSA in the school. At the moment, if the current legislation passes without this amendment, that school administration would be under no compunction to act on that request with any speed, and there would be no recourse, either, for

the student to push the deadline forward. So I think it's something that the government should accept quite readily.

I'm not exactly sure why they decided it would be good to leave it open ended like this. Certainly, if a student is coming forward and they've come to a decision, if you really take a good, long think about it, a student who decides to come forward and ask for the establishment of a GSA has made a very, very long and difficult decision and has come forward at some risk to themselves and of perhaps being denied and in being unsure and – who knows? – in the world that they're in in their own school, given the circumstances of the changes to legislation that this government wants to make, maybe in fear of the possibility of being outed. It's a very difficult situation that they are finding themselves in, and they've come to the decision to ask for a GSA to be established in their school, yet there's no deadline that the school has to meet. That's certainly going to weigh on the minds of a student who's thinking about coming forward to make the request. I mean, it will have, I think, a pretty chilling effect on the number of students who decide to come forward, period.

I don't know if that was the government's intent. I don't think so. The Education minister has repeatedly said in this House that their goal is to encourage the establishment of GSAs at the request of students who come forward, and they have gone out of their way to attempt to convince the public and members of this Assembly that they in no way, shape, or form want to do anything that would get in the way of the establishment of a GSA, whether it be in a public school, a charter school, a private school. It's the ongoing argument of the government that, yes, indeed, if a GSA is requested, it will happen; the students will have that request granted. However, the legislation currently requires no timeline to be followed. To me that is a gaping hole in the legislation.

**8:50 p.m.**

I think it's reasonable that if indeed the Education minister and the rest of the members of the government caucus are serious about their desire to have a very open door and a very welcoming opportunity for students who wish to establish a GSA to feel comfortable enough to come forward, then the students should know that that request will be treated with respect and in a timely fashion, timely meaning without any undue delay and quickly. You know, it should be something that's dealt with quickly. For a student who's come to this very, very difficult decision to request a GSA, it means that they see no other options for them to make the connections they need to decide to come out to the world, to their family, to their friends. They need the assistance of a safe place in which to do so.

First of all, not knowing that that request will be dealt with quickly will probably cause a lot of those students not to bother. I don't think that's the goal of the government in leaving the timeline unwritten, but I think it's going to be the effect of leaving it open. Without having school administrators, school boards compelled to deal with the request within a two-week period, it leaves it open to perhaps let things die on the Order Paper, to hope that the student might just go away, that they may lose their nerve, that something will happen to cause the student to just not pursue the matter.

As I've said before, I hope that that is not the intent of the omission. It certainly could be argued that it might have been, but I take the minister at her word when she says that they are intent on making sure that the GSAs are legitimate instruments which are accessible to students and that they will be accessible in a timely fashion. Well, I think that we owe it to those students to put that in writing and to say to the students: yes, indeed, you can come forward with a request that is as serious as asking for a GSA to be established in your school so that you might have a safe place to

decide how and when to come out to your parents and family and friends in an effort to perhaps resolve the biggest, most pressing issue that you've ever faced in your life as a young person and hoping to keep your family together and to come out in a way that may allow your family, who has issues with having a gay child, to keep that family unit together.

Knowing that that administration may not have to deal with it right away, in my thinking process, if I try to put myself in the mind of an individual student, a young person who's wondering whether they should come forward and make the request for a GSA, I'd be very hesitant about coming forward if I thought they could drag their feet interminably. I mean, I'd be looking at the rules and regulations if I was a student. If you're in junior high or high school, you can read. That's one of the first things that would come to mind if I was looking at making such a request. I'd be wondering: "What rules are there? How do I make this happen? Can I make this happen, and if I make the request, when do they have to respond?" If I'm looking at the rules and saying, "My goodness, they don't have to respond; there's no timeline here," the effect is going to be pretty chilling. I may just decide not to go ahead with it because I don't want to leave it hanging. I've made the request, and who's going to be told about the request in the meantime? I mean, I want action on the request.

This amendment, Mr. Chair, demands that the action be taken. It's a time frame, I believe, that allows the administration to put in place the necessary personnel and organize the mechanism, the structure to get the GSA in place, but it's a timeline that also means that they can't dilly-dally on it. They've got to get on it, and it's the closest thing to immediate that you could have without causing it to be done that particular day. It's quick – you better believe it; two weeks is pretty quick – but indeed it's the type of timeline that a student in the situation of one who's asking for a GSA to be established should rightfully be able to expect of a school administration.

I know that the rubber will really hit the road with Bill 8 if the minister ever actually orders a school to go ahead with the establishment of a GSA and if they end up with a refusal, but what we have with this legislation is at least a timeline that the minister can, I think, use as a tool to insist upon the measures that she indicates in her legislation she is proudly establishing. A timeline really goes and legitimizes that. It tells the people of this province and those who are wanting to establish a GSA that the government is actually behind them and that they believe in them and that there's meaningful intent on the part of the government to fully honour the commitment that they say they're making to young people who want to establish a GSA. Without a timeline, that commitment rings hollow. It really takes the teeth out of the request or the power of a student to demand the establishment of a GSA.

I would hope the government sees the wisdom in adopting this amendment because I think it adds to the government's argument that they are truly the ally of the LGBTQ2S-plus community. If indeed that alliance is real, then the establishment of a two-week period within which a school administrator must establish the GSA upon the request of a student is perfectly reasonable. If the minister would like to be able to wave any type of a flag and say, "Look, we are the champions of the LGBTQ-plus community, we're on their side, we respect their need to have a safe space, and the GSAs are something that we believe in," then adding a timeline requirement is perfectly legitimate.

I'd love to hear the minister's response. I can't say that she would be anything other than supportive of this if indeed her claim to be supportive of the LGBTQ2S-plus community is actually legitimate. I believe that she's honestly supportive. We differ on her means of actually designing and putting in place these GSAs, but I think we

can together make this approach to establishing GSAs a little bit better, safer, more effective, and usable for students who might consider establishing a GSA if indeed we have a timeline in place. The two weeks, I think, is reasonable.

I ask all members opposite to consider the wisdom of doing this and to place themselves in the position of a young person who is considering coming forward to ask their school principal or administrator to establish a GSA. Whether they're in junior high or high school, just imagine yourself in that student's position, how difficult a decision that is to make, to come forward and ask for the establishment of a GSA yet knowing that right now the rules don't demand that that decision be made or that request be granted within any length of time, meaning that it could be dragged on forever.

*9:00 p.m.*

A two-week period, Mr. Chair, I think is a reasonable expectation. It certainly doesn't allow any time to drag one's feet. In school administration terms or any bureaucratic terms it's a fairly quick time frame, I agree, but we're talking about a very fragile point in time in the life of a young person who's made a very, very significant decision to come forward. I think we have to respect that fragility and take advantage of that window of opportunity where the student has decided to come forward and make that very serious request. That means they've decided to act on their need to keep their family unit together, on their need to become public about who they actually are. If that window passes and that young person decides that it's not safe to come out, that it's not safe to use the instrument of a GSA because it lacks any teeth, because a timeline isn't something that the school has to follow, then that student may never again decide to come forward, all for the sake of a lack of a timeline that the school has to follow.

I don't know how long that window is open for an individual student, how long they've been thinking about it before they come forward. I'm sure it's not a quick decision that they've come to when they decide to ask to establish a GSA. It's a pretty serious and potentially life-changing event. So once that student has decided to come forward, the time within which the administrator should be allowed to set it up and respond and actually establish the GSA should be pretty short.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

As the amendment states, Mr. Chair, two weeks is the time frame that we believe is reasonable. I think that, upon consideration, the minister and other members opposite will come to the same conclusion, that a timeline is something that should be adopted as part of this legislation. Most legislation, no matter what subject matter is at the core of it, has some type of timeline to it. If things are open-ended, then they're open to high levels of interpretation. When we're talking about the lives of Albertans – the highest order of responsibility that a government has is to protect the health and lives of their citizens – then I think it's important that consideration be given to the effect of not having a timeline in this legislation. It's a small piece. It's fairly simple, but the lack of the timeline has very complex consequences. I think I've outlined them pretty clearly here.

There are other aspects to this. I won't get into them right now, but of course if one has a timeline in a piece of legislation and then an administrator or a school principal fails to meet those timelines, that may be another ground for calling for an amendment right there. I just wonder, Mr. Chair: what might happen if indeed there was a school administrator who was faced with a timeline and failed to establish a GSA after all due processes had been followed and the administrator of such a school tells the minister to take a hike? That begs the question: what other consequences might there be?

When the minister has clearly stated that she supports the establishment of GSAs to protect students who wish to have one and that the government believes that the legislation that they're wishing to implement and have passed in this House is going to give the highest level of protection to LGBTQ2S-plus youth in the schools in this province, then indeed there's got to be some means of enforcing the implementation of GSAs. Part of that is insisting upon a timeline, but another part of it, I think, following from that, will be the ability of the minister to take action against a school administrator who refuses to implement a GSA even at the expiration of a timeline, which we hope will be implemented as a result of the acceptance of this amendment that we are proposing right now.

As I mentioned, it's not an unreasonable amendment. Most legislation of any kind has timelines right through it. A very common thread of any piece of legislation is that there are timelines attached, and this piece of legislation, strangely, has an omission, and that is that the administrators don't have to act. As I mentioned before, I'm concerned that students, as a result, will just decide to simply not come forward with a request to establish a GSA, and that will have significant consequences in the lives of those young people. If they indeed don't take the opportunity that they see in front of them to ask for the establishment of a GSA . . .

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

Do I see any other hon. members looking to speak to amendment A5? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows rising to speak.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to rise to speak in favour of amendment A5. Before I start my comments on amendment A5, I really wanted to thank you, Minister of Education, for, you know, your encouragement and agreeing to the spirit of the amendment that we have been discussing this afternoon for some hours.

It was, I think, such a coincidence today when in my previous time I surprisingly mentioned: how could it happen in a House of 87 that we don't really find anything in common? Even though, you know, we have been elected on different political stripes, both sides of the House got elected on the commitment to serve the people of Alberta. Under the Constitution, once you're elected, it does not matter what stripe the member for your riding is, not only on economic issues but when it comes to social issues like this, specifically when the members of the government have many times reiterated that they strongly stand to defend the rights for the GSAs and QSAs. So it was kind of saddening and surprising to see that, that there was not something where we can come to a common place, when in fact both sides of the House are here to make the House work for the people of Alberta, to make this House work to serve the interests of the people of Alberta. This is the experience, I will say the hope of light I have seen today, that both sides of the House were on the same page, at least when we were discussing the issues regarding the most vulnerable people of Alberta.

*9:10 p.m.*

Also, when speaking to the previous amendment, it was my view – this is how I interpreted it – that this side of the House, by proposing those amendments, I would say, was trying to bring in a reasonable argument by proposing very positive opposition. I did not really see that the members of the opposition, my colleagues, were, you know, doing something for the sake of doing it, and I was so happy to see that both sides of the House were actually on the same page on that issue.

Speaking in favour of this amendment, amendment A5, once again I see that it's also, actually, supporting the spirit of the

proposal already in Bill 8, I will say, and the claim that the government also stated many times in their statements and have repeated many times, that there is a reason the students can request to form a GSA. I do think that without adding this timeline, it does not provide the accountability of the legislation. By proposing this amendment, what we are trying to do is add accountability to the provision that the government side is already proposing. So this will really help, you know – how would I say it? – the schools, the teachers, or the administrators to put someone in charge and develop the organization mechanism. If the students come forward and there is accountability to the legislation, there is transparency in the legislation that one can expect the outcome in a given time frame – this legislation is not only important because it's having accountability on this; it's also very, very important what this legislation is trying to address by proposing those provisions.

When we are discussing this Bill 8 and this amendment to add a timeline, we know that we are discussing or referring to something with regard to the most vulnerable community in our province. Our Premier and the Government House Leader have many times, you know, repeated their statements that they're committed to defending the rights of the GSA and, not only that, even their commitment to provide, like, the best security to that community in Canadian jurisdictions. Looking at this amendment, I think that there should not be any problem with the government caucus or the government members, the members of the UCP caucus. We are just adding the timeline. We have discussed this, and many of those people know that without the timeline, it will make the legislation so weak. It will depend on, you know, the individuals who are responsible to deal with the issues: how they want to interpret it, how much they are entrusted with on the request, how much they are convinced by the request being made. It will create more problems. It will probably create more problems for regulatory bodies, schools. It will create problems for the government as well, I think.

Looking at this amendment, I'm very hopeful. As I've said, I've seen some light of hope in this House. Giving serious thought to what we are discussing and what we are trying to propose to the provisions in Bill 8, it's just adding some accountability where the government already believes in something. This should be no problem, voting for this amendment.

First of all, I really request both sides of the House to give serious thought to this amendment. I'd say that this is a very legitimate amendment to the provisions and the solutions the government side is already trying to propose. This is actually strengthening those provisions, so nowhere is there a contradiction to what they are trying to move forward. It in no way conflicts with the views of those provisions, you know, in Bill 8. Rather, it strengthens those provisions and the views and the spirit of those provisions in the bill that the government has tabled. I'm very hopeful that the members of this House, by giving serious thought to this amendment, can support this amendment and should support this amendment.

Given how serious, you know, this issue is, how vulnerable that community is whose rights we are trying to protect through this bill, we are concerned that some of the provisions of this bill would expunge the legislation that provides security to the community. There is, I think, hope. Once again, we have spent hours continuously working in the House, as the Government House Leader has already said. This is a time where we can take a look at this. We are, both sides of the House, committed to doing something to protect the rights of the GSAs, QSAs in the schools and to provide security to the most vulnerable community. We once again can come together and work for the amendments that strengthen the provisions that are provided in the bill. They will grant the security

of those QSAs, GSAs. That will also help the schools to move forward to develop the mechanism in schools to address the issues, address the requests in a timely manner. There will be some – I'm just trying to find the word. I couldn't find the word I wanted to use. I'll say "accountability" right now.

*9:20 p.m.*

I wanted to be brief this time, but as I said earlier, there are numerous studies – they're conducted around the world; they're conducted in the province; they're conducted in the country – showing how vulnerable this community is, how complex this issue is, how important this issue is, how seriously we need to think about it. If we will not sit together now, if we will not come to wise solutions right now, it will make the problem worse sooner or later. We have seen that if we do not address these issues right now – you know, we and the people of Alberta have seen kids walking out of schools, we have seen kids demonstrating outside the Legislature, and we have seen kids across the province and we have seen people across the province sharing their concerns that they're not going to accept it – and if we don't sit together, then we will be debating this again.

This issue is not going to go away because this is something to do with the lives of the most vulnerable people, that we committed to work on behalf of when we committed to run for the political parties. It doesn't matter which side, which stripe of the parties. That's why during the campaign the leader of the government, the Premier, was very clear that he is not going to legislate or try to debate these social issues. They understand the importance of this. He said it many times on many platforms, and he said it in the House.

What I've been seeing here for the last two days is that we were trying to find the workable space in something the government is already proposing. The government believes that they're going to move forward with those changes, and they still say that moving with those changes is going to provide the required security to the community, I will say. Looking at that, we had our own perspective. We had differences; we have debated all those differences here. By proposing this amendment and the amendment that was before it – the Minister of Education has already said, acknowledged that it was something in the spirit of the bill. We were happy to see that.

There's no way we cannot support this amendment. This amendment is to strengthen the provisions, going forward, that will provide some accountability to the schools in the legislation. If the schools, if the persons responsible do not act in a timely manner, there will be consequences. Also, it provides guarantees to the students that if they come forward with their request for a GSA/QSA to be established and they have the confidence to do so, to come out and make a request, there is transparency in that. There's a timeline. There's accountability on this.

Even though adding this amendment is not really going to address all the concerns that the LGBTQ2S-plus community have raised – it's not going to address all the questions and concerns they raised – I still think this will be moving forward in the right direction, also creating the environment in the House that we are the people responsible. We are here to make this House work together, to make this House work to serve the people of this province when it comes to, you know, providing the security of their fundamental rights when we are discussing GSAs, QSAs.

I have 10 pages of this survey that was conducted by the recruiter organizations and with the partnership of the universities of this country. I did not go into the details I was going to read about this. These are the concerns we are trying to address and where we can send a message that when it comes to something like this, yes, we sit together, yes, we listen to each other, and, yes, we learn from it,

too. There's going to be a commonality many times in this House on a lot of issues when it comes to talking about the fundamental rights of any community.

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

I see the hon. Minister of Education rising to speak.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing me. I would like to address this amendment. I understand the intent of it, and we all can agree that when there's an inclusion group, whether it's a GSA, a QSA, or any of the other ones under section 35.1, we would want it to happen in a timely manner. When I was working and speaking and collaborating with the College of Alberta School Superintendents and many of the other boards that I was speaking to, I heard that they found that the way it was under Bill 24, with the word "immediately," was too prescriptive, that it didn't allow them the flexibility to have the conversations to put full thought into who the liaison would be. What I see here with the two-week period is, again, very prescriptive.

I would also remind the opposition that section 35.1 is more than just about a QSA, a GSA.

If one or more students attending a school operated by a board request a staff member employed by the board for support to establish a voluntary student organization, or to lead an activity intended to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging, the principal of the school shall

- (a) permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school, and
- (b) designate a staff member . . .

and it goes on.

But what I really want to draw to your attention is that

an organization or activity includes an organization or activity that promotes equality and non-discrimination with respect to, without limitation, race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, including but not limited to organizations such as gay-straight alliances, diversity clubs, anti-racism clubs and anti-bullying clubs.

So at any given time a principal or a leader of a school may be faced with a number of organizations or a number of activities all coming at the same time. To facilitate the requirement that they be put together and granted within a two-week period is too prescriptive. That's what I heard from those that I was consulting with.

**9:30 p.m.**

Therefore, I would ask my fellow members to not be in support of this. What we have currently under section 35.1 of the Education Act does in fact imply and does state that the organizations will be allowed to form and that they will be formed in a timely manner but without the prescriptive piece to it.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen to speak.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments from the hon. Minister of Education. I guess, you know, here we are with an opportunity to look for a practical way to solve this issue around timeliness, and we've talked a lot about it over the last while. I can mention another example that I dealt with, that came to my attention as minister, where a student, basically, was being obfuscated on starting a GSA in a Calgary school for almost a year, I think, or even more than a year. This was one of the reasons that

I came to realize that we need to have some kind of time restriction or some timeliness number built into legislation.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to the Education minister: let's pick a number. If it's not two weeks, then maybe we can make it four weeks. Like, honestly, if we could come up with an amending number for timeliness that's actually written down, I think we can see real success here in regard to Bill 8. I really believe that we could show, you know, demonstrable progress, and, through the chair to the Minister of Education, I think that that would be a really useful thing. I would say: if it's not two weeks, then let's pick a number, right? I'm perfectly willing to work with that. It should be in reasonable timeliness, but it has to be measured out. I can think of a particular case, for example, where, like I said, in Calgary Catholic it was more than a year, and that was unacceptable. I think that if we came out of the Chamber here tonight with a number that defined timeliness, we could have something that we could really show was a measurable and quantifiable sense of progress around this GSA business.

I can tell you as well, from my experience from Bill 10, that, you know, during the course of a couple of days we saw things change. We saw actual progress on the floor of this Chamber, and it was quite good. You could take that to the public. I mean, Bill 10 was a point in time, obviously – we've moved on from there – but people could see that there was multiparty co-operation and a genuine way by which we could show safe and caring schools for kids and something tangible around timeliness in the formation of a GSA.

Through the chair to the minister: if she could think of a number, right? I mean, you know, we came up with two weeks, and it was okay, I guess. But if she's got a number that is more amenable to her, then I'm certainly willing to work with that, a collaborative effort for the sake of the kids.

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

Do I see any other members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South rising to speak on amendment A5.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to be here and to debate amendment A5 with you. I think it's something that's very common sense. I mean, the Minister of Education spoke a bit about how she heard from superintendents and called her superintendents, that indeed she believes that "immediately," as was set under Bill 24, was too onerous for school administrators and was too prescriptive for school administrators. But I think the Member for Edmonton-North West has raised a very important point here: two weeks is certainly not immediately. Two weeks certainly gives the school time to find a teacher liaison, staff liaison, or have one appointed from outside the school district if that's necessary.

Frankly, if two weeks is not enough and the minister believes that she requires more than two weeks for some of these schools to be able to comply with the legislation, then I think the opposition would be very open to having that discussion and finding a day and a time that works for all schools across this province because we, as the opposition, understand how important it is to have GSAs and QSAs in schools when they are requested by students. That means setting a guideline in legislation here, setting a restriction in place so that schools and school administrators cannot use an indefinite amount of time to try and find a liaison as an excuse, really, not to establish a GSA, right?

We know, Mr. Chair, that that has happened in some schools in the past, in some districts and in some schools, and not a lot, but indeed some students were prevented from having GSAs and QSAs. Indeed, they were prevented because administrators claimed – and maybe they truly could not find a liaison to attend the GSA

on behalf of the school. That is going to be a real issue with some school boards. That's a thing that this House will have to address and that the Minister of Education will have to address. That's why there are provisions to ensure that students have the supports that they need. To have students receive the supports that they need, we know that they must not be forced to have to drag their feet on this, and they must not be able to be stopped through an administrative process.

Really, I remember, Mr. Chair, when I was in high school and Bill 10 was coming through this House. I mentioned this before already. When I was in high school and Bill 10 was coming through this House, basically this exact same thing came before this Assembly. It was determined that, actually, the government at the time, the Conservatives at the time, actually said: well, if the school refuses to allow a GSA and drags their feet on a GSA, then the student can appeal to the school board, and if the school board refuses to allow the GSA and the students are not able to get their GSA or QSA established by the school board, then, in fact, they can appeal to the courts. I believe that's something that basically is what the minister is sort of suggesting students do here if we don't have a timeliness clause. If we don't have this amendment that forces schools to actually do the right thing and establish these GSAs, we'll be seeing students be forced to go through quite lengthy experiences through appeal processes and then appealing perhaps to the Privacy Commissioner and appealing to the school board and appealing to the courts. That is something that I think is very unreasonable to ask of students.

It's very unreasonable to ask students to probably be outed if they are trying to start a GSA because they are a gay student. To have to go through a public appeal process, whether that's to the school board, to the courts, or to the Privacy Commissioner, you will absolutely be outing students, and that is something that nobody in this House wants. You will absolutely be dragging kids through the mud, and you'll be segregating these students into social situations that you cannot expect a 13-, 14-, 15-, 16-year-old to reasonably anticipate. Really, you cannot expect that a student that is, let's say, 16 years old and in grade 10 or 11, trying to establish a GSA, has to go through a court process because there's no timeliness clause like in this amendment, that they would actually have the resources to be able to fight an entire school district on this.

I think it's something that we need to look at and say that there is a reasonable amount of time that we should give administrators, absolutely. Administrators do need the ability to establish the GSA in a productive manner. As the minister had mentioned, the superintendents had said that they needed the ability and flexibility to negotiate with their schools and staff to figure out how the GSA would operate within the school. But, certainly, as the Member for Edmonton-North West suggested, there is a time that could be set. We know it won't take you six months as an administrator to establish a GSA. If it takes you two years to establish a GSA after students have requested one, you're obviously dragging your feet, Mr. Chair. In just one school year you can see substantial staffing changes. Within one school year you can see substantial staffing changes within a school.

When we look at how this amendment is laid out and what would be considered a reasonable test for administrators and school principals, districts, and so forth to have to go through, I think it is very reasonable to discuss having a timeliness clause. When these students request GSAs, QSAs, or, as the minister likes to call them, inclusion groups, these types of organizations, what they are doing is that they are trying to find a safe space for them because they may not feel safe in other areas. They may not feel safe, whether that's at home or whether that's in their community or whether that's in

their classroom, in their friend group. Whatever it is, Mr. Chair, these students are looking for an outlet where they can have friends that they can hang out with and discuss their life issues.

*9:40 p.m.*

That's something that I think has a significant benefit to mental health. We've seen that in numerous documents tabled here in this Assembly. That's something that we know has a significant reduction in things like youth suicide rates in this province and across the world, and we know that GSAs are able to accomplish that. Having a limitation on that, from the day the request is sent by a student to when the administrator must grant that request, is something that I think is very fair.

We see that in many different types of legislation. When you file many types of applications to the government and whatnot, Mr. Chair, oftentimes there is a time limit in which the government is expected to reply. In fact, when we do things like estimates here in this Assembly, we actually request that the government give written responses by a certain date, things like that. That's because, as responsible adults, we understand here in this Assembly that deadlines are effective.

I think that the teachers in this Assembly – I know that the Member for Edmonton-North West and other members here were former teachers – will understand that having deadlines is important, and deadlines help ensure that what you're requesting students do and what you're requesting be done by the administrators in this case actually gets accomplished. The administrators won't, for lack of a better term, Mr. Chair, procrastinate. We do want to ensure that these provisions aren't used as a way for administrators, school districts to drag their feet.

We want to ensure that school boards will comply with the law in a timely manner so that these students, when they make their requests, aren't left in the wind waiting, holding this bag, trying to figure out what will happen. They aren't left wondering if they need to start filing appeals, if they need to find a lawyer to represent them, Mr. Chair. I don't think you can expect any reasonable teenager to have to go out and try and find a lawyer to sue their own school board just because they want to start a student organization that provides a safe space for gay kids. I think that that's something that should be very straightforward. It's something that every single member of this Assembly should be able to agree with.

I think that the Member for Edmonton-North West said it most acutely, that if two weeks is not amenable to the minister and to the government, then we can find a day that works. We can find a length of time that works. If that's a month, if that's two months, if that's what the superintendents think that they need, then that's fine.

Mr. Chair, I personally think that a shorter time period is better. I think that two weeks is a relatively happy medium. It allows time for an administrator to go talk to all their staff and discuss if any of their staff are comfortable and, if not, to go and find somebody who is comfortable to host and organize a GSA on behalf of students. That's something where, if an administrator thinks that they need four weeks for that, then let's have that subamendment, and let's have that debate here on the floor today because that's what we're sent here to do. It's to make sure that these bills that we pass are the best they can be.

I think that Bill 8, Bill Hate, the act to destroy GSAs, is not a good bill, Mr. Chair, but I think that this amendment absolutely makes a bad bill better. I think we can definitely spray some Febreze on this bill and we can try and make it better. We can try to ensure that these students' protections – even though the protections are reduced under this bill, we can try and ensure that at least within two weeks of when they request those protections,

they're able to receive some of them, that those kids are able to have a safe and inclusive space in their schools within two weeks.

Mr. Chair, I'm sure that many members here will remember that when they were in school, two weeks seems to go by really quickly because a lot happens in a school year. A lot is going on, and you're spending time trying to understand what's going on in your classes, what's happening in your friend groups, all these things. But, really, when a request is made to start a student organization, I can assure you that the majority of schools won't take two weeks to start a debate society, let alone a GSA. It's a matter of finding the right people and putting them in a room together and finding a supervisor to monitor a lunchroom so that the kids that want to be in a GSA or a QSA, a gay-straight alliance or a queer-straight alliance, can meet. I think that two weeks is more than enough time for that.

Of course, the government may have a different time frame in mind, and we're happy to discuss having a longer time frame or a shorter time frame if the government thinks that that's important. I think it's something that will make this bad bill better. I think it's an amendment that every single member of the government bench here should take a solid look at and read word for word. It doesn't actually change anything in the bill other than the timeliness factor, other than saying: we believe that schools should be accountable to a certain frame of time. Schools should have a deadline. Just like teachers would give deadlines to students for assignments, Mr. Chair, when a student requests a GSA or a QSA or an inclusion group, then we absolutely should have a deadline for these schools.

We should have something that says that this was a reasonable amount of time, that the school has had enough time to do its due diligence. I think two weeks is a happy medium, but I'm happy to discuss a longer time. That's something that is very important. I know that the minister also understands that schools should not be using the excuse that they cannot find staff members or whatever it is as an excuse to not form GSAs because we all in this Chamber understand how important these GSAs and QSAs are and how effective they are in reducing things like teen suicide.

When we talk about these issues, we need to recognize that in an evolving classroom environment and in a complex classroom in these schools, yes, absolutely, superintendents will feel that in some cases the legislation is prescriptive and will feel that, yes, in cases the legislation is even restrictive. But what this will do is that it allows the ability for the superintendents to be flexible, as the minister would like them to be, while also holding them to account, because we know these school districts should be accountable as well and that they shouldn't be allowed to run free rein on these students if the students are requesting a GSA.

That's very simple because we know that some school boards, not a lot, Mr. Chair, and not a lot of school districts or administrators, will be dragging their feet, but we want to make sure we protect the students under the ones that are because we have an obligation to every single student in this province, whether they are lesbian, whether they are gay, whether they are bisexual, whether they are transgendered, whether they are two-spirited, whether they are queer or anything else. We absolutely have a duty in this Chamber to ensure that they have their protections and that they have their protections in a timely manner, that they are able to establish those GSAs, that they are able to have those requests granted.

When we talk about the school districts that are perhaps less willing to have them, perhaps the Minister of Finance's school district would have dragged its feet a little bit. I can't speak to that, Mr. Chair, but certainly based on their policies, it seems possible. Perhaps those types of schools would have dragged their feet a little bit. I think that those types of schools should absolutely have a

reasonable amount of time to try and seek out a staff member or outside person to monitor a GSA because perhaps the Minister of Finance himself does not want to monitor the GSA. Perhaps the Minister of Finance's other board members or people that were on the staff of that school do not because of the policy that they've put in that says that being gay is a deep sin and should not be allowed in their school, but the protections in this act would say that that school should still be allowed to have a gay-straight alliance and should still be allowed to have a queer-straight alliance. So that school does need time, probably, to find somebody to monitor their GSA.

Perhaps the teacher that would monitor a GSA would be worried they'd get fired for doing things that were against their code of conduct, for being sinners, as it were, Mr. Chair, but indeed that board and that school now have the opportunity. With this amendment they would have two weeks to go find an alternative. That would allow them to comply with the legislation while giving them plenty of time to make sure that they found somebody who wouldn't be affected by their school code of conduct and wouldn't be in a difficult position within the school board.

That, I think, is very important, and that speaks to what the minister was talking about. It speaks to the minister's concerns that superintendents found "immediately" to be too prescriptive. This isn't immediately; it's two weeks. Perhaps we want to set the time a bit longer, and that's okay. If you are in a small private school like the one that the Minister of Finance was on the board of and you have made a point of identifying gay people as sinners, perhaps no gay people want to come and run your GSA because they're worried what that school will do to them. That's why a certain amount of time is being provided. That's why we can make that time longer if we have to. That's why we have to debate in this House, and that's why we have to look at the amendment and say: what is a reasonable amount of time? What do we consider in this Assembly to be too long?

There is going to be a point where every member of this Assembly will agree that this school is intentionally trying to drag its feet. That may be two weeks, that may be four weeks, that may be six weeks, eight weeks, but at a certain point I think that every single member of this Assembly will recognize what procrastination looks like. I'm sure the ones that have children will recognize it when their kids say, "Well, I'll get to it next Friday," and then when Friday comes along, they say, "I'll get to it next Monday," and when Monday comes along, they say, "I'll get to it the Monday after." Suddenly you realize that their room hasn't been cleaned in three months, and you wonder where the three months went and when the kid went from six years old to 12 years old.

**9:50 p.m.**

Mr. Chair, that's what we want to say is a reasonable restriction. We want to prevent that two weeks from becoming six years. We want to make sure these schools are held to a standard, a standard that says that we understand there are complex needs in every school district across the province. We understand there are complex classrooms and boards that have issues with certain ways of life and certain staff members that wouldn't want to do this. We recognize that, but what we do want to say is that there's a limit to what we understand is reasonable. The limit that passes from reasonable to unreasonable is when a school is intentionally trying to prevent a GSA by dragging its feet. That's what an amendment like this would change.

I welcome a subamendment from the government. I hope that we'll be able to see more debate on this because I think the minister understands and members of the government backbench and front bench understand how important it is that we set a deadline and a

timeline for schools and for superintendents. They understand how important it is that we work with our school boards to find a date that works for them. This is something that I think everybody can agree on, that you don't just let people run willy-nilly around the legislation and use excuses to avoid legislation and to not uphold that rule of law that's in the Education Act. We want to make sure that there's a tool in place and a restriction in place that allow us to say: "Well, you've had enough time to do your due diligence, and if you've failed to establish a GSA or QSA within this time frame" – and that time frame can be a number we set here in this Assembly today – "if you've failed to do it in that reasonable amount of time, then you obviously are not trying to actually uphold the legislation; you're trying to find a loophole."

That's something, Mr. Chair, that I don't believe the majority of school boards will do or that the majority of superintendents or school districts will do, but I believe it can happen. I think that anybody here who has ever taught in a classroom or anything like that will recognize that that does happen, right? Ninety per cent of the kids will get the assignment in on time, yet 10 per cent of students will go: well, can I get an extension? Then after the first extension, they ask for a second extension, then maybe a third extension, too, and then they say, "My dog ate my homework" or whatever it is. When that happens, at a certain point you realize that this student is trying to avoid the restrictions that are in place for every other student. That's what can happen in a very small number of school districts across this province, and that's what an amendment like this would prevent. That's what this amendment would allow us to have a reasonable limitation on.

I think it's something that we should work together on here. It's something we should work collaboratively on here because we have this opportunity to make this legislation better. We have this opportunity to find a date that works for everybody, that works for school boards across the province, and that we think is a reasonable amount of time and won't be overly onerous for school districts. We don't want to be onerous; we don't want to be too prescriptive.

We understand that we absolutely need to make sure the rule of law is upheld in this Assembly. We understand that this legislation is designed to save lives. If we want it to work, we actually do need to have these reasonable restrictions and we need to make sure that everyone understands that these reasonable restrictions are in place. That's something that I think we can have a debate on tonight. We can have the discussion, and we can figure out a time that works. It's something, a date, that we can set, and it's a timeline that we absolutely should set here in this Assembly tonight. It's something that I think we'll be able to come to an agreement on. I hope we'll be able to find that time.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar rising to speak to amendment A5.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I want to respond to some of the comments that the Member for Red Deer-North made in justifying encouraging her colleagues to vote down this amendment. This is the old canard that if we impose these kinds of deadlines, schools couldn't possibly deal with the expected flood of requests. We're not just going to have to deal with GSAs. Then we're going to have to deal with antiracism clubs and antibullying clubs and any other kind of club that students want to form to make their schools safe and inclusive, and that will just be an administrative nightmare.

I just took a tour, Mr. Chair, through some of the clubs and activities that are offered by junior highs and high schools in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. Certainly, this is something

that I'm paying a lot of attention to because my daughter will be going to junior high this fall. Of course, having a school that provides a rich extracurricular life was important to her, so I've spent a lot of time over the past few months researching what the various schools in the constituency have to offer. It's interesting.

We look at Ottewell school, for example, one of the junior highs in my riding. They offer archery, Chinese culture, Chinese dance, Citadel Theatre, computers, concert band, drama productions. They have a GSA; I'm very pleased that they advertise that on their website. They have a jazz band, a library club, provincial, national, and international trips, Reach for the Top trivia team, something that I encourage any student to get involved with. I'm proud to say that I was a provincial Reach for the Top champion in 1995. That was an experience that I valued, and I think that that would be a valuable experience for any student. They have regional and national math competitions, robotics team, science Olympics, skiing and snowboarding, spelling and writing competitions, spirit days, talent show, and Touch of Class Dance. They also offer a number of athletic programs. They have senior boys' volleyball, senior boys' basketball. They have coed curling. They have girls' soccer. They have a number of sports teams.

Now on to Kenilworth school. Of course, Kenilworth school offers a number of clubs to its students as well. It's a smaller school, a population of about 150 students less than Ottewell school, so their capacity is a little bit more limited than Ottewell school. They offer a travel club. They offer a ski and board club. They have Shakespeare Week. They offer a French exchange trip. They offer a drama club. They also have athletics, Mr. Chair. They offer soccer and basketball, and they also have a running club and volleyball. So a wide range of clubs and activities are available to students at Kenilworth school.

Hardisty school is another. It's actually combined kindergarten to junior high, so they have students from K to 9. They offer a number of clubs as well, Mr. Chair. They offer a chess club. They have a youth leadership club. They have both a jazz band and a concert band. They encourage their students to participate in AMA patrols. I know that the intersection on 106th Avenue right in front of that school gets very busy, so I appreciate all of the safety-conscious students and staff who work hard to make that patrol work and keep our students safe as they're crossing the street to go to school at Hardisty. They offer lunch movies. They have a program called the Digital Hornets. Now, I'm not sure what that would be, but it definitely sounds interesting, and I certainly look forward to inquiring at Hardisty school at my next visit what the Digital Hornets would be. They have Young Life, which is a Christian youth organization. They also offer a ski and board club. They have a handbell choir. Of course, all of the members of the Legislature appreciate handbell choirs when they come to share their Christmas cheer with us during the holiday season. They have a travel club.

They have soccer teams for both boys and girls. They have volleyball teams for both boys and girls and junior and senior teams. They have basketball for boys and girls, both junior and senior teams. They have a track and field team. They have an indoor soccer team that's coed. They have a cheer team. They have badminton teams, a wrestling team, and they also have intramurals for all grades.

*10:00 p.m.*

In addition to all of those activities, they offer some special activities throughout the year. They have assorted field trips. They have a mountain ski trip. They celebrate aboriginal day. They offer band camps. They have outdoor ed camps, school dances. They put

on a grade 9 farewell. They have guest speakers, Mr. Chair. I've been honoured to be a guest speaker at a number of events at the Hardisty school, and I look forward to visiting them again. They go swimming at the Hardisty pool. They offer Read In Week. They offer Christmas concerts. They have awards ceremonies as well.

Mr. Chair, also in my riding we are pleased to have the Vimy Ridge academy, which is both a junior high and a high school, and they offer a number of extracurricular activities as well: badminton, track and field, cross-country running, golf, basketball, volleyball, intramurals. They have a climbing team. They have a rugby team. They have a cycling team. They have a photography club. They have the Duke of Edinburgh young Canadian challenge. I certainly hope that, you know, the members of the Duke of Edinburgh young Canadian challenge live up to the spirit of the Duke of Edinburgh's public service and don't take his, let's say, tendency to shoot from the hip when he speaks to heart. They have a yearbook club. They offer a leadership club. They have a student council. They have the Vimy ambassadors program. They have a Europe trip.

I'm also pleased to represent the students at McNally school, which has a number of clubs and activities. They offer Best Buddies, Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program. They put on the Cappies, which is a critics and award program. They have a Citadel Theatre students' club. They have a Doctor Who Club, Mr. Chair, and the interesting thing about the Doctor Who Club, of course, is that the room that it's held in is bigger on the inside. They have a gay-straight alliance. They have a grad council. They have a hip hop collective. I'm sure that the word "collective" makes the UCP members' skin crawl, but I have to say that, you know, the young people these days appreciate collective action and collective responsibility. They have the McNally Assists Students Serving in Volunteer Experiences program, the McNally International Club, the McNally Student Governance Club. They have a multicultural club, a multimedia club, a music club, a robotics club, a running club. They offer a science Olympics program. They have a ski club. They have a students' union. They have the Triple C, which is the Chinese culture club, and – I don't know – I'm curious if the Chinese culture club just offers the song *Karma Chameleon* but sung in Chinese or perhaps something else entirely; I'm not sure. Of course, you'd have to be familiar with the group Culture Club to get that joke.

They also offer a number of other programs, including the Alberta High School Mathematics Competition, the APEGA science Olympics. They participate in the Canadian mathematics league, Canadian Open Mathematics Challenge. They also participate in the Cayley, Fermat and Euclid mathematics contests, the Create in 8 art partnership, the dx.org design competition, high school model United Nations, the Iverson Computing Science Competition, the national biology competition, the national chemistry exam, and they also participate in Skills Canada.

Mr. Chair, it's quite clear from just taking this rather cursory survey of a few of the junior high and high schools that are in just the riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar that the capacity for administration of these schools to facilitate a wide variety of clubs is quite high. So when the Member for Red Deer-North gets up and says that, "Oh, if we impose these strict deadlines upon principals and school administrators to form these GSAs, they couldn't possibly deal with all of these requests," that's quite demonstrably untrue. We have a number of cases here that I've just outlined. Schools have a tremendous capacity to facilitate clubs of all kinds, and they are very successful at doing so, in fact, committed to doing so to make sure that their schools are safe and inclusive and provide a rich academic and a cultural and an athletic experience for all of their students because, of course, that develops the whole person.

You know, schools recognize that a student isn't defined by just their academic experience alone, that it's all of those things that are included in the school experience – participating in those extracurricular activities, participating in those sports teams, having those opportunities to go on exchange trips – that really make the school experience valuable and memorable and such a critical piece of making sure that our students grow up to be good people.

You know, it begs the question, Mr. Chair. We demonstrate quite clearly just by looking at any – I would say it's not a random selection because I've chosen only schools in Edmonton-Gold Bar, but I'm sure that the case would be the same if you looked at any school in the province, that they offer a wide variety of extracurricular sports activities. They're very capable at handling those things. When the Member for Red Deer-North gets up and says that administration couldn't possibly deal with all of these potential requests, it's demonstrably untrue. We see quite clearly that junior high and high schools can capably handle requests for a wide variety of clubs, and they're quite successful in doing so.

It's also interesting, Mr. Chair, because, of course, the Member for Red Deer-North says that, you know, if we put in these timelines, then students are going to flood administration with requests for a whole host of antibullying clubs. Not one of these schools that I've gone through has had more than one club that has been dedicated to creating a safe and caring and inclusive environment. We don't see Ottewell school or Kenilworth school or Vimy Ridge school or McNally or Hardisty with more than one club dedicated to creating a gay-straight alliance or promoting antiracism initiatives or promoting antibullying initiatives or any of those kinds of things.

The Member for Red Deer-North is quite clearly creating a straw man argument, if you will, against voting for this amendment. I hope that the Member for Red Deer North reconsiders her words. She's a person with considerable experience in school administration. I understand that she has spent some time on the board of the Red Deer Catholic school district, so she knows full well what administrators are capable of. I hope the other members opposite at least can demonstrate that they have faith in our principals' and other school administrators' ability to deal with requests from students to form these kinds of clubs – gay-straight alliances, queer-straight alliances, whatever you want to call them – in a timely fashion.

As my friend from Edmonton-South said, lives hang in the balance. It's been quite clearly demonstrated that gay-straight alliances save lives, they prevent students from taking their own lives or, you know, falling into depression and anxiety and all of those other kinds of mental health issues that come along. If we know that a gay-straight alliance can prevent these things, it only makes sense that we implement a timeline for their implementation. To not do so would be to deny students access to something that would make their school lives, certainly, a lot better and may potentially save a life.

I hope the Member for Red Deer-North reconsiders her statement earlier about this amendment. She understands quite clearly, as I've demonstrated, that principals and administrators have significant capacity for facilitating a multitude of groups that students want to participate in. She can actually demonstrate that she has faith in school principals and administrators to do the good work of making their schools safe and inclusive and providing the kinds of clubs that students request in a timely fashion.

Like my friend from Edmonton-North West says, two weeks was just a suggestion. The original legislation, of course, said that they needed to be formed immediately. It's interesting that the members opposite voted for that legislation when we brought it forward, and

now they're walking back their commitment to implementing timelines, deadlines for the formation of GSAs.

*10:10 p.m.*

Maybe the language around the immediacy of the formation of a GSA was too strict. I doubt that that's really the case, but we're willing to work with all members of this House to come up with a deadline that works for principals and administration and balances the needs of administration to deal with requests like this but also recognizes the fact that students deserve to have a GSA in place in a timely fashion if they're requested to do so.

I look forward to all of my colleagues demonstrating their faith in administration, in principals and other school administrators, to be able to handle these kinds of requests in a timely fashion and also honour their commitment that they made a number of years ago when they voted in favour of legislation that promised to enforce immediacy in forming a GSA and come up with some way to make this amendment amenable to themselves, the schools, and administrators that they're concerned about but also make sure that they send a clear message to students that students can't be toyed with, that they can't be just shuffled off and told to wait forever for a GSA.

Knowing that all of my colleagues here in the House are sensible people who have a great deal of faith in principals and administrators to handle this kind of request and also because we know that they have quite clearly demonstrated a commitment to providing GSAs to students who ask for them, just do the right thing here. Be consistent with the way that they voted when we passed Bill 24, and take it upon themselves to implement these timelines so that students don't have to wait forever for an administrator to form a GSA.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Do I see anyone looking to speak to amendment A5? I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung rising to speak.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Pleasure to rise again to address amendment A5. It's interesting to note that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar went back to talk about his constituency as he quite commonly does, and it is, I think, a very good practice for members of this Legislature to follow when discussing any piece of legislation: take it right home, take it to the local level, and take a look through the prism of one's constituency experience what the importance of the issue at hand is to our own individual constituents.

I was prompted by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. As I considered this amendment as he spoke about the clubs that were established already in all those different schools that he mentioned in his constituency, I was reminded about the schools in my constituency as well and what capacity all those school administrators have shown in establishing a myriad of various different school organizations, including GSAs, Mr. Chair. I know that the timeliness of responding to a student is an important feature of the whole concept of the success of a GSA, and bringing it back home to the constituency is a good reminder to us all when we're thinking about the process that a student would go through and what the dynamics are at the local level and at individual schools when a student actually decides to follow through on their thought process and make a request for a GSA in their local school.

It begs the question of why there is no deadline in the government legislation proposed today. I'm hoping that the amendment that we are bringing forward to establish a timeline is one that is adopted by the members opposite. After a full debate here I think it's

becoming very clear as members on this side of the House continue to bring forward arguments demonstrating the wisdom of having a timeline on the administrators who are requested to have a GSA put in place.

I've heard arguments from government MLAs and particularly from the Education minister, who has said, Mr. Chair, that she feels that the amendment, which proposes a two-week timeline within which a GSA must be established after it's initially requested, is, in her words, "too prescriptive." In response to that, of course, the MLA for Edmonton-North West, on the opposition side, asked and challenged the Education minister, then, to suggest a time frame that she thought might be workable in establishing a GSA within a school upon the request of a student.

I wondered about and tried to understand why the Education minister thought the two-week period was too prescriptive, and then, after having listened to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talking about the high level of capacity that schools have in establishing a multitude of various different clubs and organizations within each school, in fact, you know, there is no water to be held in the argument that schools aren't able to establish a GSA within a fairly tight time frame. They do establish groups of many kinds regularly.

It occurred to me that given that this legislation is being publicly discussed and that, of course, within the school realm teachers, school administrators are regularly aware of what happens in this Legislature, particularly when legislation that affects the operation of schools is being discussed, they will probably see fit in their staff meetings and in contemplation of what they might have to change in terms of practices in upcoming months and in the next school year to have already started to discuss contingency plans for getting ready to deal with the legislative changes that might come down.

In so doing, they are probably forming in their own minds and perhaps even at staff meetings the frameworks that are going to be necessary to establish the processes for putting in place a GSA or a QSA once the request has been made by students. I would argue that many of these discussions have already taken place in the school boards and in staff meetings over the last number of months and weeks, in particular, of course, since we've had a requirement as a result of legislation passed by our previous government that the GSAs/QSAs should be established on demand, and that these processes were established.

There were very, very few outliers that failed to meet the requirement, and it was widely accepted throughout the public school system, the Catholic school system. There were very few that didn't follow up and actually report to the Minister of Education and verify that they indeed had established a process to respond to a request for a GSA or a QSA within the time frame, basically immediately, and that they were prepared to undertake that responsibility. We're talking about a very small number of schools and school boards that are deciding that it's not within their responsibility or that they disagree with the requirement to form a GSA or a QSA in response to a request. That is something that, regardless of whether a timeline is imposed or not, may be an issue that the current Education minister will have to face in the not-too-distant future.

*10:20 p.m.*

However, Mr. Chair, with respect to the amendment at hand, as the Member for Edmonton-North West has asked and openly requested of the Education minister, let's come up with a number. Let's talk about what length of time the Education minister feels is reasonable to demand of the public administrators and school boards to establish a GSA, a QSA once requested. Having said in earlier remarks that she feels that the two-week period is too

prescriptive, I'm just wondering what sense the Education minister has of the urgency that exists in the mind of a young person, a student in junior high or high school, as far as their need to be responded to quickly.

I believe – and it's my opinion – and I strongly argue that we're not talking about a situation where, if we're in medical terms, you go to see your doctor to get a throat infection or a common cold looked at. This is an emergency situation, and I think it has to be treated as such. To claim that two weeks is too prescriptive I think shows a lack of grasp of the gravity of the decision that the student has made. I really believe that we should be treating this as an emergency ward visit. When a student decides to come forward with a request to ask for a GSA or a QSA in their school, this is an urgent situation. It's not something that we can slough off and say: well, goodness, the school can't deal with that administratively; you can't put that much pressure on a school to come forward and create a GSA or a QSA in two weeks or immediately. It misses the mark as far as understanding how serious the issue is and how consequential not getting a quick answer can be for a student who's made the decision to come forward and ask for the establishment of a GSA or a QSA in their school.

I truly believe that we are dealing with a student who is in a definite emergency situation. They have a limited golden hour, a golden period within which a response must be forthcoming from the administrator or the school principal, Mr. Chair, and that golden time frame may indeed be a life-changing event and perhaps a life-ending event, consequentially, if indeed the response isn't forthcoming quickly enough. For a student who comes forward, makes a request, and gets no answer or feels that they are being denied the right to establish a GSA or feels that the school administrator is dragging his or her feet in an effort to dissuade the student from continuing their pursuit of the establishment of a GSA, it will potentially result in that student giving up, becoming disillusioned, perhaps sinking down into depression, perhaps ending up not being able to carry on with their studies, leaving the school, maybe ending up, as a result of that, in a worse situation, on the street, maybe out of their own home.

It's an important, emergency situation, in my view, Mr. Chair, that schools, school administrators who are asked to establish a GSA do so quickly. I don't accept the argument that it creates an insurmountable administrative burden on the school that is faced with a request to establish a GSA. This is something that you clear the desk for. This is something that you absolutely take and prioritize as order number one on your schedule for the day as a school administrator.

If you get a student coming forward and saying, "Look, for the first time in the life of this school I want to establish a GSA or a QSA," that means that you take it seriously and you clear your desk. You get that request made in proper form, and you end up putting in place contingencies. As an administrator, knowing that the law has changed and that there are, hopefully, timelines in place if this amendment is accepted, you end up dealing respectfully with that request because you know and understand exactly what's going on with that student and that student's decision to come forward at that time to make that request and what the consequences are for that student if indeed they don't feel they've been respectfully treated and that the administrator is dragging his feet or ignoring the request or perhaps even actively trying to dissuade the student from pursuing it.

There has to be a deadline that recognizes that this student is in a crisis situation, and as in any crisis situation that the government faces, whether it be fire or flood or other kind of emergency, you basically drop everything else and you focus on that. It's not something that's going to be a daily occurrence for a school

administrator or a school board to deal with. When they have a request for a GSA to be implemented in their jurisdiction, this is something that they should come to expect and prepare for. In fact, I would go so far as to say that a school board or administrator should actually establish a GSA just as a matter of course, you know, notwithstanding the fact that one may not be requested. We should establish one anyway, but that's another story.

Once the request is officially made, though, you can't doddle about it. It's a golden-hour window of time that a student is in, and it's a crisis mode that they're in when they make that decision to come forward and ask for a GSA to be established. Not to respond effectively and right away with a positive response to that student to say, "Look, we're on it; we're moving forward with it; we have a process in place, and here it is; here's the timeline; this is what you can expect because we prepared for this" – we know that the probability is pretty high, as a school board or as an administrator, that we would face a request like this, and they should have done some preparation in advance for it, and the contingency should be in place.

In fact, as a ministry I hope that there are guidelines and templates that a school administrator can reach out to access in the event that they do have a request made early on in the passage of this legislation. I would expect that the ministry probably does have these preparations made to assist schools that do ask for help in quickly establishing a GSA in response to a request, but school administrators, too, have a responsibility to prepare in advance and expect or assume that they're going to be faced with a request for the establishment of a GSA or a QSA in their school. Not to do so I think is an abrogation of their responsibility as administrators in this day and age, knowing how probable it is that they will end up having a request in their school for the establishment of a QSA or a GSA.

I'm not off the top of my head able to quote what percentage of schools right now have established a GSA or a QSA in response to a student request, but I know it's a growing number of schools in the public school board and school boards across the province. It wouldn't surprise me at all to know that every school and school board across the province ends up with a request and therefore establishes a GSA or a QSA if indeed school boards and administrators are honestly responding to such requests.

*10:30 p.m.*

A school board, I think, that is seen to be dragging its feet, no matter whether there's a deadline or not, is probably going to be subjected to some very public demonstrations. I would imagine that the student who has made the request has planned to gauge the amount of resistance they feel that their particular school or school board might mount in opposition to the establishment of a GSA or a QSA. There are jurisdictions in Alberta which are less friendly, let's say, to the gay community than others. I'm thinking of municipal jurisdictions where we've seen refusals to allow the pride flag to fly, where we've seen the necessity of our former government ministers to in fact create an alternative flagpole or allow them to be flown on provincial flagpoles instead of the municipal flagpoles where they were denied, where pride crosswalks and pride colours have been defaced.

So there are jurisdictions where a student may feel much less comfortable coming forward to ask for the establishment of a GSA and where a school administrator, who is faced with the legislative responsibility to establish one, even may feel some local pressure to not comply as quickly as possible or to drag his or her feet on it because of local public pressure, and that's something I think the Education minister, Mr. Chair, has to be aware of and I'm sure is

quite aware of. That's another reason why I think the timeline is a requirement. It's not something that's an option or something that we can actually allow this legislation to move forward without.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, speaking to A5, I believe I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen to speak.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've been very privileged to hear some of what my hon. colleagues here in the opposition have been saying tonight. I'll note that the Government House Leader noted earlier tonight that he doesn't think any Albertans are watching us and that this is a waste of our time and Albertans' time and taxpayer money, but I'll note that there are at least three or four very dedicated Albertans in the galleries right now watching the government chatter away while we debate what's going to happen to kids' lives as we move forward. I know many of them actually in the gallery here messaged me earlier on social media and said that they were intent on watching us stand up for the rights of Albertans and stand up for the rights of our most vulnerable youth.

I mean, in this amendment, I think, is something that is so simple. It's something that says that we have to have a timeliness clause. We have to have the ability to discuss and have a limitation on what is a reasonable restriction.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung spoke a little bit about this, but when we look at jurisdictions across this province and how resistant they've been after the last four and more years, Mr. Chair – we can look at Taber, for example. I know that the Member for Edmonton-McClung alluded to that. In Taber the municipal district actually refused to allow a pride flag to be raised. Our former Minister of Infrastructure had to raise a flag at the Infrastructure building. We can see that that is the type of people who would be willing to delay the implementation of a GSA or a QSA. Those are the types of organizations and people who would be the ones that would drag their feet on allowing a GSA or a QSA to be established.

Again, we can see that in all of the hundreds of municipal districts and municipalities covered under the MGA and the city charters here in Alberta, it is a very small number of municipalities that we are having those problems in. I believe that that's going to be the same with schools. It's going to be a very small number of schools that are going to want to drag their feet. I mean, maybe it's the Minister of Finance's school, maybe the school that he was on the board of, that thinks being gay is a sin. Maybe those are the ones that will be dragging their feet and those types of institutions that don't think you should either be gay or do yoga. I mean, those are the ones.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

But, really, we know that the vast majority will comply, and the vast majority – welcome back, Mr. Chair – have complied because under Bill 24, that the former NDP government brought in, every single public, separate, and charter school did comply by bringing in a safe and inclusive policy.

But we recognize that sometimes schools need that little extra push. Sometimes administrators need that little extra assistance to talk about how they need to be timely. Schools will use an excuse like "Well, we want to talk about finding a staff member" or "We want to talk about the name" or "We want to talk about whether there are enough kids for this organization," whatever it is, for the GSA or the QSA. Whatever it is that the school is going to do, some schools, a very small number of them, Mr. Chair, will drag their feet and will try to prevent the establishment of the gay-straight alliance or the queer-straight alliance.

That is something that this amendment would prevent. It would allow us to say that in a timely manner, within a reasonable amount of time – and that's two weeks in this amendment. I'm happy to see if the government would want to subamend that to a longer time frame or a different time frame – longer, shorter, whatever they think is reasonable – because we understand that you can't anticipate every single situation in this province. But we can anticipate that there is what we can consider a limit on how long you should be allowed to search, how long you should be allowed to make excuses or try to deliberate amongst yourselves about whether a gay-straight alliance or a queer-straight alliance should be allowed.

I mean, it's very clear when we talk to young students how important this is for them. It's very clear when we talk to people like Jane MacNeil, who was a proponent of Bill 24 just a few years ago, which the Member for Edmonton-North West, when he was Education minister, moved forward. She was probably a unique case. She had spoken at length in the media about how, when she had decided to come out to her parents, she knew that her parents were actually supportive and were supportive of the LGBTQ2S-plus community, but she still spent the time mentally preparing herself in case her parents evicted her. In grade 6, Mr. Chair, this girl was worried about whether her parents would kick her out. And that's what GSAs and QSAs would create: a safe space for students to have those discussions amongst their peers, amongst their friends, and to feel like they could be accepted even if they know that their parents will be supportive.

A quote from Jane MacNeil, when she says: but then the day I was planning to do it, I remembered that my parents would kick me out; they're probably going to be cruel. That's her quote. And she was somebody who understood and her parents understood and were very supportive, and she still was worried about it. That's what we want to make sure we have a timely process in place to prevent. To have these kids having that safe space, to understand that we don't want grade 6ers worrying about whether they're going to have a roof over their head the next night: Mr. Chair, that's something that's very important.

When we talk about it, we can see that in Jane's case, in her Catholic school, she didn't have a GSA at the time. In fact, she actually said that she felt rejected and isolated. Another quote is: when I was at my old school, all the stresses made me so sick that I had to transfer. End quote. Mr. Chair, that's something that's actually shocking to hear and terrifying because it's something that is what we don't want to happen to any student in this entire province. We don't want any student to feel so unsafe that they feel they actually have to leave their school, transfer to another school. They're worried about what their friends think of them, what their teachers think, and that's something that we should be able to prevent in this Assembly.

That's something that this amendment would prevent because it would create that environment which will allow these students to have those discussions amongst themselves and have those peer-led discussions that will allow them to learn about what a GSA is, what being gay is, what being lesbian is, what being queer is, and have those discussions and understand that gay people and lesbian people and bisexual people and transgendered people are just normal people, like you and me, Mr. Chair, ones that just want to live their lives and go about their daily lives.

Unfortunately, if we don't move forward with this amendment, we actually have a situation that is going to be unsafe for some of these kids. If we don't move forward with this amendment, what will happen is that we will have some schools, a very small number, that will be preventing the GSAs and QSAs from being formed, and kids like Jane won't be able to have that safe support space. They

won't be able to have that supportive environment, and they're going to be in a position where they're not sure if they're going to be safe coming out to their parents, whether they're going to be safe coming out at their school, whether they're going to be safe coming out to their friends.

*10:40 p.m.*

That's something that we should all be striving to avoid in this House. It's something that we should be striving to try and fight against in this House. I think it's something that we all can agree on, that students should have the safest possible environment, that students should have the safest possible learning environment. That's something that we should be very excited to support here in this Assembly.

I mean, of course, as the Member for Edmonton-North West and I spoke to a little bit earlier, we're happy to debate the merits of this particular timeline in this amendment. We understand that government sometimes has different opinions on what "reasonable" means. We all know that government doesn't move quickly often. We all know that sometimes things take a bit of time, and that's okay. We can accept that, we can work with that, and we can move forward with that as long as we can establish what a reasonable timeliness would be, as long as this amendment could then say: okay; administrators have four weeks or six weeks or eight weeks or half the school year or one semester or whatever it is but within a reasonable amount of time. I think that, certainly, within a semester a school should be able to find somebody to establish a GSA or a QSA.

I think that those are things that are very important. [interjection] I mean, we see the hon. Premier laughing away over here. It's unfortunate that he thinks the timely establishment of GSAs is a laughing matter, but that's the reality of what we're trying to debate here tonight. We're trying to make sure we have a responsible government that will move forward and have a system that will protect our students in a timely manner.

In this amendment it says: "two weeks." I'm happy to entertain a subamendment, and I'm sure my hon. colleagues here in the opposition would as well. I mean, it's something that we want to discuss. I think we can definitely look at the merits of any amendments that would come forward because we know that this is something that will make a difference in the lives of students. We know it's something that will make a difference in the lives of kids and will have impacts, including reducing the rate of student suicide, teen suicide. We want to move forward with these things that improve mental health for students across our province. We know that they're not laughing matters. We know that they're matters that are serious, and we need to have a timely granting of these requests. When kids make these requests, we need to be able to move forward with them. We need to be able to move forward and have an understanding of it.

I mean, Mr. Chair, I know the Premier understands some of these issues. I know the Premier has very strong opinions on some of these issues and especially on the formation of GSAs, QSAs and what happens to gay and lesbian people across this country and in others, actually. In fact, in San Francisco in 1988 the Premier said, and I quote: what happens if a gay or lesbian activist group wants to gain the accreditation of the association of students at a Catholic university? In 1988 the Premier was aware of gay and lesbian activist groups in Catholic institutions. That's something that I think is very interesting, that we would be able to stand here a good 20 years later, 21 years later, and we're still debating those same gay and lesbian issues that the Premier was bringing up in 1988.

The Premier also once in 1995 spoke about a group called Loud and Queer. He called it a ridiculous excuse for theatre. Mr. Chair,

that's something that's very interesting as well. I wouldn't think that any queer group is a ridiculous excuse for theatre. I find them often quite amusing myself. The Premier was aware of them as late as 1995, but it actually comes later than that. The Premier actually spoke about gay issues in 1998, the very famous Vriend case. He referred to the decision as a virus of judicial activism in January 1998. So we see this trend of the Premier being aware of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirited issues. We see that the Premier really does understand these issues, and he has a history of activism about these issues. It's something that I think is very important because here today, if the Minister of Education and the government really do believe that GSAs save lives and that GSAs work and that we should support QSAs and GSAs, we should support them in a timely manner.

We can see that the Premier has also understood this for so many years. We can see that indeed in January 1998 Premier Kenney – sorry; the current Premier of Alberta; I withdraw the name, Mr. Chair – actually urged former Premier Ralph Klein to overturn the upcoming Vriend decision by invoking the notwithstanding clause of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms here in Canada. The history of activism of the Premier around LGBTQ2S-plus rights here in Alberta and around the world I think speaks to perhaps why this government is so offended to say: "Wow. Two weeks. We can't let them start a GSA in only two weeks." That's because the Premier has a long history of thinking that GSAs are something that needs to be debated and that gay people and lesbian people are people that we shouldn't support.

Unfortunately for the Premier, Mr. Chair, the opposition is here to bring light to these facts, to bring light to the quotes from the Premier, and to show Albertans that we are the ones standing up for gay students, that we are the ones standing up for everyday Albertans, who understand how important these rights are.

In fact, in May 1998 the Premier said: I think the reaction of the Vriend decision opens the window for a provincial grassroots populist party with conservative values. That's interesting, Mr. Chair, because that speaks to the very opposite of what this bill would propose, and I think that it speaks to the opposite of the values of this amendment as well. It's something that the Premier needs to explain, why he would be against an amendment like this or a bill like this. It's something that I think is very interesting.

When we look at the history of what this government does and says, when we look at the history of what this Premier does and says, it is important that we recognize that this bill and this amendment are supposed to help save lives. They're supposed to help recognize and support gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, queer, two-spirited, and other students. We understand the history of the Premier's obsession with gay people, the obsession of the Premier with gay and lesbian rights, the obsession that he had with fighting against these rights. Perhaps that speaks to why this amendment is going to be voted down by the government, perhaps that speaks to why this government cares so little about establishing timely GSAs, perhaps it speaks to why they really disregard how damaging this will be to students across this province, and perhaps that's why they want schools to be able to drag their feet, Mr. Chair.

I think that if they vote against this amendment, it will be very clear to Albertans that that is indeed the case, especially to the people watching in the galleries, especially to the people watching at home. They will understand how offended this government is by the very concept of having gay people in our classrooms and in our hallways and in our Legislatures. It's something that I think that Albertans will be very interested to hear.

We can see that in May 1999 the Premier called the M. versus H. ruling one of the most outrageous exercises of raw judicial power

in the history of modern democracy. That was a ruling about spousal rights after a lesbian separation. Mr. Chair, the Supreme Court actually ruled that gay couples are no different than heterosexual couples in their ability to share loving unions, but the Premier spoke heavily against that. That is what is so shocking, and that explains why the Premier wouldn't support timely establishment of GSAs. That explains why the Premier would be so offended by the idea that within two weeks of a student requesting it, you should have a gay-straight alliance in a school or a queer-straight alliance in a school. It explains why this amendment would be so appalling to the Premier of Alberta, a man who has a history, going back over 30 years, of attacking LGBTQ2S-plus rights, of attacking the rights and human rights of gay people across this country.

We can see that when Pride TV was brought up in April 2000, Mr. Chair, the Premier, then a Canadian Alliance Member of Parliament, said that it would be wrong to license Pride TV. He was opposed to having a gay television channel, because God forbid that we have gay people on TV. That would be appalling. I'll bet you that the Premier refused to watch *Star Trek* for the same reason.

But I think that something that is very important to us is when we look back at the history of why the Premier would vote against this amendment. We see that in 2002 – we're moving forward in the timeline here – the Premier actually said: when the Supreme Court invented a constitutional right to sexual orientation, a right based on sexual conduct, they opened the door for polygamists, advocates of incest, and others to claim the same status as homosexuals. Mr. Chair, that is absolutely outrageous. It's outrageous that the Premier would compare gay rights to a slippery slope to polygamy and incest.

It shows how little regard the Premier has, and this is a history of how little regard the Premier has for gay rights and gay people. That is something that I think all Albertans are interested in. They are interested in knowing why the Premier would vote against timely establishment of GSAs. We're establishing, Mr. Chair, that it's not something new, that it's something that has been ongoing for many, many years, that the Premier over a long, long time has been opposed to gay people, has been opposed to the concept of being gay. That's why . . .

10:50 p.m.

**Mr. Ellis:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** A point of order has been called.

#### Point of Order

##### Relevance

##### Allegations against a Member

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Chair, thank you. A point of order under 23(b) and, actually, also under 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives." This is bordering on the outrageous and, sadly, the ridiculous. When I read this amendment, that "a policy established under subsection (2) must contain a requirement that any request made by a student pursuant to section 35.1(1) is granted no more than two weeks from the day the request is received," I'm not sure how a historical account going back 20, 30 years on the Premier has any relevance to the amendment that is before us right now, not to mention that under 23(i) – I certainly don't have the benefit of the Blues at the moment, but certainly the accusations that are being made against the Premier are, quite frankly, outrageous and ridiculous.

I certainly am not going to put words in your mouth, Mr. Chair, but this member needs to stay on point, stay on topic. If he wants to talk about the amendment, we're certainly here to listen about that,

but the stories that he is talking about have nothing to do with the amendment before us.

**The Acting Chair:** The MLA for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that what the hon. member is trying to achieve is contextual, and I believe, you know, that the substantive part of the argument of the point of order is that it's a matter of opinion and not a statement of fact. I would suggest that while the hon. member should always continue to refer back to the amendment, I think that he's been working a larger context of framing the reference to the actual amendment.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

I am prepared to make a ruling.

**Mr. Loewen:** Mr. Chair . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Is it going to add anything further?

**Mr. Loewen:** Yes, please.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Loewen:** Yeah. I just wanted to point out that under 23(h), "makes allegations against another Member," clearly those comments were directly towards the member. They were not towards the government. They were not towards policy. They were directly towards the member, and that's clearly a violation under 23(h). I think it's absolutely clear that the member needs to apologize, withdraw his remarks, and not continue to do that. That's very clear.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you for that.

Anything further to add? Anything new?

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is new information. I don't have the benefit of the Blues in front of me, but I do believe that I was referring at length to how this is contextual information on the timeliness clause that this amendment actually refers to. I did mention that, in fact, I'm going to say, at least about eight or nine times after every single point I made, that it was contextual as to why this timeliness clause may not be supported by – and I did in fact say it – the government in many of those cases. I do believe I was referring to why the government may not support this amendment and to the timeliness of this amendment. I would endeavour, of course, through you, to try and keep it to the timeliness of the amendment, but I think that context is important, and I would encourage you to rule that way.

Thank you.

**Mr. McIver:** New information.

**The Acting Chair:** We will accept new information, Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Under 23(c) it says: "persists in needless repetition." I think the hon. member just stood up and said that he repeated the same thing eight or nine times – his words – not 30 seconds ago, Mr. Chair. He's out of order.

**The Acting Chair:** The Official Opposition whip.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, that is another, entirely different point of order. I would suggest that the hon. member is

moving laterally out of the original context in which this point of order was called by the government whip. I think we should keep that in mind as well.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, and thank you for your input.

I am prepared to rule on the point of order: relevance, allegations, and repetition. Throughout the debate we have been giving latitude to each member to speak to amendment A5. I will encourage all members to recognize that relevance is important and to stay focused on that.

I do not believe that allegations were made. I do believe that in trying to set context, the member has made assumptions on intent from other members, and I would caution the member from doing that going forward.

I do not believe that a point of order has been made here, but I do encourage members to stay focused on amendment A5 as we have it presented here. Thank you.

You may proceed, Edmonton-South.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course, I think that something that is very important, as we understand, is that we don't make assumptions or allegations here in this Chamber but that we allow Albertans, especially those watching at home, to make their own conclusions on what the greater context applies to as to why a government may vote against timeliness, why a government may decide against supporting such a simple amendment.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I think it's important that we understand the context of what certain members of the government have done in the past. I mean, we can look at as recently as 2005, Mr. Chair. As recently as 2005 we saw the hon. Premier actually say: the fact is that homosexuals aren't barred from marrying under Canadian law; marriage is open to everybody as long as they're a man and a woman.

Mr. Chair, that is absolutely ludicrous. It's absolutely ludicrous that we would see this clear attack on the rights of gay people to marry between themselves. And we can see . . .

**Mr. Loewen:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Chair:** A point of order has been noted.

### Point of Order Imputing Motives Language Creating Disorder

**Mr. Loewen:** The member just said that the Premier attacked people. That's clearly a point of order: 23(h), (i), and (j). He clearly just said that. We need to finally stop these kinds of unavowed motives, these crazy allegations like that. There's no doubt that comments like that are likely to create disorder in this House. It's unparliamentary; it's unacceptable. We need a ruling against this member to keep him straight. This is unacceptable. If this continues, we'll continue calling points of order until this member is corrected. It's very simple: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Clearly, he said that.

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any other members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South rising.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that certainly in matters of debate we can speak to issues that are contextual and before this

House and debate how we believe amendments should be moved forward and what certain members have done in the past. However, we just did have a ruling from the former chair on this exact matter, and the chair did rule that as long as we maintain the context and we're moving forward, we would be able to move forward. We also have seen that the member across did say that this was likely to create disorder, but we clearly saw no disorder in this House, and in fact many of the members in this Chamber were not even fazed by the actions. I think it's very clear that I would endeavour to not create disorder in this House, but I would ask that you rule that I'm allowed to continue with my debate.

**The Deputy Chair:** I am prepared to rule. My initial thoughts on this are that the points of view on this do constitute a difference of opinions. I do want to caution the hon. member. If he continues to come as close as he can, potentially, towards moving to something that could be considered imputing unavowed motives to another member, my worry is that we could end up in a situation where points of order are continually called. If that is the case, that will directly detract from the effective debate in the House, which, I think we can all agree, is the goal of the House at this hour.

I would ask the hon. member to consider his words carefully and to continue with his comments. He has at this stage another minute and 12.

11:00 p.m.

**Mr. Ellis:** A point of clarification, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** Sure.

**Mr. Ellis:** If you don't mind, Mr. Chair, I just want it to be clear for us on this side to completely understand. Whether it be in the Committee of the Whole or from the chair's perspective, we can make allegations against another member and talk about their history or talk about how they have attacked people? I just want to be clear that that is possible. So we can talk about other members and make allegations against them. That is what we're saying? Under 13(2), some clarification on that, please.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you. I just want to draw some attention to the difference between strictly attacking members and differences of opinion. With regard to differences of opinion there is the possibility of not actually imputing a motive to another hon. member. At this stage, again, I do not find that there's a point of order, but I do want to stress to the hon. member, in order to ensure that decorum continues, that he choose his words wisely.

Please, if the hon. Member for Edmonton-South would continue.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, yeah, I think it's important that we do discuss in this Assembly the opinions that are held by all members and how we view the issues that are before us and how we view historically the issues that are before us. It's important that we understand that the timeliness of having GSAs established and having queer-straight alliances established in the schools within a reasonable time frame is something that is going to help save lives. It's something that is going to help save students' lives and young people's lives and reduce the risk of suicide.

I mean, it's a little bit unfortunate that members of the government would try to stifle debate using points of order that you've ruled on two or three times, Mr. Chair, and that former chairs have ruled on as well, that aren't actually points of order. Indeed, I think it's certainly something that we think is important here in the opposition, and we're happy to debate no matter how

upset the government gets. The government is free to have their opinions as well and share those opinions here in this Assembly. But we will make sure we stand up for . . .

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** A point of order has been called by the hon. Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, I'll stand as often as I need to until you realize there is disorder caused in the House. The hon. member hasn't talked about the item at all since he's continued, and I'll be back on my feet in 20 seconds if he doesn't.

**The Deputy Chair:** I don't find a point of order as per the hon. Minister of Transportation.

As such, I would ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-South to continue.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just about to say, actually, that I think that the context around this amendment is so important, and I spoke to timeliness.

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

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to A5? I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you recognizing me. I'm certainly listening intently to the debate. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-South for generating a bunch of points of order so that I don't stand out as the member who gets called on points of order all the time. It's nice to have the heat taken off me.

I want to build, if I may, Mr. Chair, on the comments that I made, the last remarks that I made with respect to this bill. I recognized shortly after I sat down, of course, that the schools that I talked about in my riding are quite large schools. That's one of the benefits, I think, of being in a city, a densely populated area. I think Edmonton public is the second-largest school board in the province. I can see the Member for Edmonton-North West confirming that for me. Thank you.

You know, the schools that I mentioned in my previous comments are quite large schools, with populations of hundreds of students at the junior high level, thousands of students at the high school level, with budgets and staff that are quite significant and, of course, lend a tremendous advantage when it comes to setting up any kind of extracurricular activity. I wanted to see what the capacity was for smaller schools in the province to set up extracurricular activities and sports activities, just to see if my original comments still hold. Of course, the Member for Red Deer-North was quite adamant that there's no way that principals and administration could meet this deadline of two weeks. Certainly, it's not true in the case of city schools in my riding, Mr. Chair, but I did want to do a little bit of research to see if the same was true in smaller schools.

I wasn't sure where to start, Mr. Chair. Of course, one of the benefits of growing up in Alberta is that we provide excellent schools in all parts of the province, both urban and rural, and I was a beneficiary of that. I graduated from J.C. Charyk Hanna school in Hanna, Alberta. So I took a look at some of the programs that are currently offered in the Prairie Land regional division, in which the J.C. Charyk Hanna school finds itself. Interestingly enough, I see that the Morrin school is going to be providing a specialized hockey option this fall that will teach students in grades 7 to 9 Hockey Canada skills as well as doing dryland training, fitness, nutrition,

and power skating. That's quite interesting, that a school the size of Morrin school can offer the Hockey Canada program.

You know, one of the things that the Prairie Land regional division excels at is athletics, Mr. Chair. Even though these schools are small in terms of student population, they are certainly large in terms of their enthusiasm for sports. I notice that the J.C. Charyk Hanna Hawks took home the provincial title for six-man high school football this year. Of course, as the Hanna school is not a big school, it takes a tremendous amount of time and resources for them to field a football team, and it pleases me to no end to see that they're able to field a team capable of winning a provincial championship. I notice with some interest that Rick Haines is still the coach of the Hanna Hawks football team. He was one of the coaches of the Hanna Hawks football team when I was in high school, 23 years ago. You know, it certainly seemed to me at that time that Rick Haines was an old man, but apparently he's timeless because he's still coaching and doing quite a good job at it 23 years later. So congratulations to Rick Haines and to all of his student athletes who won the provincial championship in six-man football this year.

Alberta High School Rodeo is alive and well, Mr. Chair. A student from Berry Creek won the junior division high-point cowgirl. We've also got Canadian junior high school rodeo champion Kendal Pierson from one of the schools in the Prairie Land regional division. Obviously, schools are able to support their students participating in high school rodeo, which is an important part of preserving our rural way of life and rural culture here in Alberta. I'm proud that school divisions like the Prairie Land regional division can support students by providing those kinds of activities.

I notice that a lot of the schools in the Prairie Land regional division have volleyball teams. They've got track teams, Mr. Chair. We also have a couple of champion archers who are attending schools in the Prairie Land regional division, which is remarkable. You know, if politicians were rewarded for accuracy, I think we would miss the mark, certainly something in stark contrast to champion archers, who tend to hit the bull's eye more often than we politicians do with our remarks. They've got basketball teams, like I said. They've got track teams, rugby teams at schools all across the Prairie Land regional division. The J.C. Charyk junior high students competed at the math and science Olympics this year, and from the looks of the latest newsletter that they provided, they took home a few trophies, Mr. Chair. So that's interesting as well.

*11:10 p.m.*

But what was really remarkable, Mr. Chair, when I looked at some of the programs and extracurricular activities that were offered in the smaller schools in the Prairie Land regional division: one project that really caught my eye was the inclusivity project at Morrin school. For those of you who may not be familiar with Morrin school, it's located a few kilometres north of Drumheller. It's not a very large school, like I said, but they manage to offer a wide range of programs for their students. This year their inclusivity project took Morrin students to Germany, and if I could read from the latest newsletter that detailed their trip:

Germany is a country rich in culture and history. It is an amazing place to visit and for three students from Morrin it was a trip of a lifetime. For two weeks, Madeline Cuncannon, Taylor Davidson, Thomas Chapin and [Prairie Land regional division] Curriculum Coordinator Ellen Vanderkolk were immersed in German culture as they attended school and travelled the country.

**Mr. Loewen:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

**Mr. Loewen:** Well, Mr. Chair, we're sitting here talking about this amendment. Now, if you don't mind, maybe I'll read the amendment.

A policy established under subsection (2) must contain a requirement that any request made by a student pursuant to section 35.1(1) is granted no more than two weeks from the day the request is received.

That is the amendment, right? Am I correct? Could you clarify that for me, please?

**The Deputy Chair:** That is part of the amendment, but it seems like you've correctly stated the meat of the amendment.

**Mr. Loewen:** Okay. Well, would you like me to read all of it?

**The Deputy Chair:** No. That's enough.

**Mr. Loewen:** We're clear on what the amendment is?

**The Deputy Chair:** Yeah.

**Mr. Loewen:** Okay. Now, can somebody please explain to me how what the member was talking about had anything to do with this amendment, like, anywhere on this planet?

**The Deputy Chair:** You're rising under 23(b)?

**Mr. Loewen:** Standing Order 23:

- (b) speaks to matters other than
  - (i) the question under discussion,
  - (ii) a motion or amendment the Member intends to move.

So under a motion or an amendment . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** I'm prepared to rule. I think that this is partially a continuation of a previous statement by the same member, which was not ruled out of order at the time. That said, I do think that this would be a perfect opportunity for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to continue his statement but ensure that he does bring it back towards the relevance of A5, and if he would be so kind as to do so now, he may . . .

**Mr. Loewen:** Mr. Chair, 13(2).

**The Deputy Chair:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Loewen:** I'd like to have an explanation.

**The Deputy Chair:** Yes. So under 13(2).

**Mr. Loewen:** Clearly, the discussion had nothing to do with the . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Again, the most effective way to do this for a 13(2) would be – with regard to the debate in this House during committee there is a wide swath that has been afforded to all sides. Knowing that all sides have had the opportunity to have, as I said, a wide swath with regard to the comments that they've made on various amendments that we've had regarding Bill 8 – I think that the best way for you to receive an explanation under 13(2), through the chair, would be for the hon. member to bring it back toward amendment A5. Should I feel that that has not been effectively done, I will call the hon. member to order in that case.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Debate Continued**

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I certainly appreciate the opportunity to explain how this is connected to the amendment. Of course, the amendment that we're considering here is one that suggests that students should be granted a gay-straight alliance within two weeks of making the request to the administrators of their school. I'm simply replying to the Member for Red Deer-North's objection to the two-week deadline, when she said that principals and school administrators couldn't possibly deal with the number of requests that they would be anticipated to receive in a two-week deadline, that the two-week deadline was not feasible for them to manage because they couldn't possibly deal with all of these requests.

What I'm trying to demonstrate to all members of the House, Mr. Chair, is that schools all across the province have a tremendous capacity for establishing a wide variety of clubs and extracurricular activities, sports teams for their students within a timely manner, and I'm trying to refute the Member for Red Deer-North's assertion that principals and administrators couldn't possibly meet these kinds of deadlines within two weeks.

Now, earlier in my previous statement, of course, as I said, I listed a bunch of examples of student clubs, extracurricular activities, and student sports teams that were provided by schools in my riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar, but in my opening statement, Mr. Chair, I recognized that schools in Edmonton-Gold Bar are very large. They have large students – large student populations, rather. I'm sure some of their students are large, too. They have large student populations. They have large staff complements. They have significant budgets. I recognize that that's not true for all schools across the province, that we have a number of rural schools that don't have student populations that are as close to the student populations in my schools in Edmonton-Gold Bar, that don't have the kind of staff complements, and that don't have the budgets. Yet I'm trying to list some examples for members of the House of small schools doing big things with the resources that they have at hand. I think it's very interesting to find some of the examples that I listed already.

Of course, we've talked at length about the football teams, the volleyball teams, the basketball teams that are found in schools in the Prairie Land regional division. I was quite clear in my opening statement that I didn't pick the Prairie Land regional division because of any reason other than that I used to be a student in that school division, Mr. Chair, so I have some familiarity with the schools in that school division, and I think that they are probably excellent examples, if you will, of rural schools that can do tremendous things with the staff and the budgets and the school populations that they have within them.

Mr. Chair, I think this inclusivity project at the Morrin school is a particularly informative example because, you know, from the article that I was reading here to members of the Chamber, we have three students who are part of the project and one staff member, and they were able to go all the way to Germany and spend a couple of weeks learning the German language and the German culture and dealing with learning the lessons of overcoming a history of fascism and violence and genocide. So I think it's an interesting example to all members of the things that small schools can do with their small staff and small resources.

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Chair:** Point of order noted. The hon. Minister of Transportation.

### Point of Order Relevance

**Mr. McIver:** Yeah. The hon. member is fascinating, but I think that the relevance to the amendment before us – probably 23(b). There seems to be no connection to the time limit to form a GSA in the amendment here. Since the hon. member was talking for several minutes and made no connection whatsoever to the amendment before us, I would request that you direct the member to make a connection or sit down.

11:20 p.m.

**The Deputy Chair:** At this stage the hon member, should he choose, has the opportunity to debate the point of order.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I find it interesting that the member opposite would be raising this point of order because, certainly, in my recollection of the proceedings of the four years prior to this Legislature – it didn't matter what bill we were debating – the member opposite would talk about the minimum wage and the carbon tax. We didn't raise points of order in those cases.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but just to ensure that you focus in on this point of order, I would ask you to just perhaps keep it within that realm, and then I will make a decision.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that guidance. I don't know how much more clear I can make the connection. The Member for Red Deer-North was quite explicit in saying that school administration couldn't possibly meet the two-week deadline in this amendment because they will have a flood of requests for clubs of all kinds. What I'm trying to demonstrate in my comments is that schools, regardless of their staff size, their budget, their student population, are able to accommodate a number of clubs for any number of students in a reasonable time frame, and I think it's completely relevant to the amendment that we're debating here tonight.

**The Deputy Chair:** I'm prepared to make a ruling. It is my understanding that the point of the argument that you're making with regard to this amendment at this time I find to be within the realm of relevance in Committee of the Whole.

I consider the matter closed, and I would ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to please continue.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that ruling, and thank you for allowing me to continue to speak. You know, one of the things that I wanted to continue on, with respect to the Morrin school inclusivity club, was very particularly interesting to me.

The Inclusivity Project provides high school students with an opportunity to take action against perceived injustices in our society – to combat prejudice and discrimination to make our world a better place for everyone regardless of their differences – to promote greater Inclusion, because in the end, we all just want to belong.

That was a quote from the staff member who was tasked with running that program.

The group made headlines on social media when they invited former NFL player Esera Tuaolo – and I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing that correctly, Mr. Chair – to speak at their event. Tuaolo travelled to Morrin and delivered a heartfelt speech about the importance of including all LGBTQ-plus athletes in sports, and he reminded everyone that hate in any form is wrong.

You know, this is just, again, another example of a very small school. Like I said, the Morrin school has an academic staff of approximately 12 staff members, Mr. Chair. I don't know how many students it has currently. I can recall that when J.C. Charyk sports teams competed against the Morrin sports teams, most of the junior high grades were actually on the field or on the court at the time of the game because the classes were so small. I don't know if that's currently the case, but we're talking about a handful of students at the most graduating from Morrin school every year.

You know, when the Member for Red Deer-North tells us that from her discussions with superintendents and principals and other administrators at school boards all across the province, they couldn't possibly deal with these requests to form gay-straight alliances within a two-week time frame, Mr. Chair, it seems unlikely to me that that would be true. As we've seen from just a quick tour of some of the schools that are in Prairie Land regional division, in some of the smallest schools in the province, I would expect, the very capable staff and administration and students are able to do great things with the resources that are given to them.

So I think that even in a small school like the Morrin school or the Hanna school or the Youngstown school or the Delia school or the Veteran school it would be perfectly reasonable for an administrator in any of those schools to come forward and facilitate the formation of a gay-straight alliance within two weeks. That's a perfectly reasonable request. I think that by looking at some of these examples of smaller schools, we can see that perhaps the Member for Red Deer-North's concerns about administrative capacity to deal with these kinds of requests are a bit overblown.

You know, certainly, I would challenge the Member for Red Deer-North: if she knows of a school that has been flooded with these requests and actually has an administrative burden such that they can't meet a two-week timeline, rise in this House and give us an actual example of a school that has been so flooded with requests to form these kinds of clubs that support safe, caring, inclusive environments in schools. She assures the House that she has consulted widely with a number of stakeholders in the school system. Surely, she must have had at least one example of a school somewhere in the province where, because of a flood of requests for these kinds of extracurricular activities, the administration simply hasn't been able to deal with all the requests in a two-week timeline.

Of course, if that's the case, if she can come up with an actual, real example of a school that has struggled to meet these kinds of timelines, then I would encourage her to take up the Member for Edmonton-North West's offer to propose a reasonable timeline in response. If she can come up with an example of a school that has actually not been able to deal with these kinds of requests in a two-week time frame, then we can look at that example as a learning opportunity, Mr. Chair, and perhaps use that school's experience to come up with a reasonable timeline instead.

If the Member for Red Deer-North provides us an example of a school where they've been inundated with requests, then we can actually look at that and say: "Well, all right. A two-week window isn't reasonable in this case, but they probably could have been able to deal with all of these requests in a three-week window or a four-week window or, you know, look at the requests that they had on the books and come up with a plan right now to at least deal with that in a reasonable time frame."

You know, the Member for Edmonton-North West, when he introduced this motion, was quite clear that the two-week window wasn't a hard-and-fast timeline that we were married to, Mr. Chair. We want a deadline of some sort, right? In my previous comments I said that making a promise without committing to a deadline to meet that promise is essentially as good as not making a promise at

all. We want to be able to go back to students and say: yes, you are guaranteed to have a GSA set up in your school within this time frame. Like the Member for Edmonton-North West said, we're open to what that time frame is.

*11:30 p.m.*

We do understand that we need to balance the needs of principals and administrators to deal with these timelines without blowing up their work schedules, but we also need to make sure that students have the opportunity to have confidence in their school and their administration that they will actually get a GSA when they get one and that they won't get the runaround when they make these kinds of requests for GSAs. I hope that the Member for Red Deer-North...

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

On amendment A5 I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung standing. Please.

**Mr. Dach:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to once again rise and speak to amendment A5. I'm reminded of many stories from my high school experiences when I was listening to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He spoke about numerous examples of schools in his constituency where there were lots and lots of different clubs established by school administrators, and they all functioned at the same time, and they were put in place by staff members for the benefit of students. He listed quite a number of various different organizations and clubs and sports groups, all of which would have taken a significant amount of time and school resources and staff commitment to put into place. I think he established very, very well that schools are quite capable and administrations are quite capable of undertaking the workload to establish various clubs and organizations and various extramural activities to assist students beyond their regular classroom duties.

It's interesting to note, though, that these are established responsibilities of schools already, to undertake the effort to organize and help students organize these clubs and sports activities. It's a network and a web of activity that is something that enriches the life of the student and is probably something that the student remembers way more than any of the mathematics or chemistry classes that they might ever take. It's important work that these schools do, and it's work that has been undertaken for decades in Alberta classrooms and Alberta school institutions. It's something that school boards across the province have an expectation will be carried out by staff and administrators in schools of every description right across the province.

To argue that it's an onerous, administrative burden, I think, has been discredited by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar quite effectively, so I can't think of a reason not to write a timeline into the legislation that would require the school administrator to act on a student request to establish a GSA/QSA within a certain time frame. As other speakers on this side of the House have suggested, a timeline may be longer than two weeks, but a timeline that we're open to consider as a suggestion from the government is worthy of consideration back and forth. That's how good legislation is arrived at, by listening to each other, and that's what we're trying to do here today, actually, seriously get a grasp on what timeline might be established to, I would say, legitimize the process of establishing GSAs.

Without a timeline it really invites administrators who disagree with the GSA policy to disregard it. It's essential, in my view, that there be a timeline, Mr. Chair, established so that there's confidence in the system of establishing GSAs by students who might consider

making a request for one. Without a timeline there's no value to the whole exercise. Students don't trust it. They're not going to come forward and engage in a request for a GSA knowing that they may be in a school where the local community, including the council of the community, maybe the reeves and mayors, expresses its opposition to the gay community by refusing to participate in gay pride activities or allow a gay pride flag to be flown or defacing a gay crosswalk. That ends up being an influence upon a school administrator, who would opt to drag his or her feet in response to a request from a student to establish a GSA or a QSA.

I'm not talking about hypothetical situations, Mr. Chair. This is my actual thinking when I try to put myself in the position of a student who would be making a request for a GSA or QSA to be established in a school. If I'm in a community in Alberta where I know that the opposition is open and expressed publicly, opposition to the gay community in particular, it's a risk that a person takes to publicly declare themselves as a member of the LGBTQ2S community, and it's something that is a fight every day. You have to suffer slings and arrows and slander and fight for your rights to actually exist in that community. Then to not have a timeline on a school administrator when that student decides to go ahead and ask for a GSA or QSA to be established leaves little confidence in the mind of that student that that administrator is actually going to go forward with it.

There are pressures in that community upon that administrator to do what he or she can to disregard such a request. There's ostracism that takes place even against the school administrators in a small community. I know this because I've known teachers who are teachers in small communities and even within communities in larger centres. Teachers are subjected to arguments made by parents and groups of parents and individual groups of people who would lobby schools to take certain positions. They are subject to being influenced by opinion leaders who may happen to disagree with the GSA implementation in a particular local school.

It's absolutely essential that a timeline be ascribed to the requirement of an administrator to establish a GSA if indeed the whole process is to have any legitimacy whatsoever. As I say, the only reason not to write a timeline into the legislation would be to swing the door open to administrators who disagree with the GSA policy, to give the option to not follow through on a request and to deny it by dragging one's feet, to delay, delay, delay.

As has been said, justice delayed is justice denied. In this case, a GSA request delayed is one that ultimately may get denied or simply one that doesn't come to fruition because the student gives up on the process, is demoralized by being ignored and delayed and obfuscated by an administrator who is being pressured by his local community not to get a GSA established in a particular school. That type of reaction is something that one might expect or certainly that one can see follow from leaving the door open, by having no timeline attached to the requirement for an administrator to establish a GSA. It begs the question: why? Why a government who is full of intelligent people would think that this omission would go unnoticed is beyond me.

*11:40 p.m.*

We certainly have noticed it, and we're standing up to defend those individuals who the government purports to say have the right to establish a GSA and whose position they respect according to the Education minister, who suggests that the policy they hope to enshrine in Bill 8 is going to be the strongest defence of rights of LGBTQ2S-plus individuals in the country. Yet it's glaring weakness is demonstrated by the lack of a timeline in this very, very essential piece of the protection of young students in the crisis situation in their life, when they are asking for help from their

school. The one island of safety that is often offered to students is the sanction of their school, and in this particular case we are denying them that life preserver by not writing a timeline into the legislation that would require a school administrator to react in a very timely fashion to a request for the establishment of a GSA or a QSA.

I think that other speakers, Mr. Chair, have detailed quite clearly the risk of harm to young students who end up not having help offered through a GSA to come to terms with their own sexuality with their parents and the relationship within their family. The consequences are very, very severe and significant. That's the whole crux of the matter. That's what we're trying to avoid, harm to young people, by ensuring that they have a right to establish a GSA and by making sure that they can insist upon it by having rules that administrators have to follow, by not having it be an open-ended decision, by not giving discretion to administrators to just delay the reaction time to a response and therefore end up having the request die on the Order Paper, or the students get so frustrated that they just go away, perhaps not even deciding to go ahead with the request in the first place because they have no faith in the process.

What we're trying to establish here, Mr. Chair, is that the government recognizes that these student populations, those who they say that they are protecting, have faith in the process. Without this timeline there is no confidence; there is no faith. If I put myself in the position of a young person who was a member of the gay community looking to make a decision about coming forward to ask for a GSA, in my school I would hesitate – and that's putting it mildly – to come forward with the legislation in place that the government is proposing whereby the school administrator has no requirement to act swiftly to get the GSA, QSA established.

It has certainly been demonstrated, I think, quite well this evening by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in particular, that the schools have capacity to establish numerous types of clubs and extracurricular activities beyond the core subject matter that teachers have a responsibility to teach, and it's something that's considered to be a matter of the responsibility for teachers to carry out beyond their role as educators, or as part of the role as educators. It is perfectly reasonable to expect that the establishment of GSAs and QSAs could be absorbed quite easily within the administrative capacity that already exists in Alberta schools, so I would hope that government members are increasingly convinced that the school boards and administrators must be required to act in a timely manner. We in the Official Opposition are quite open to suggestions from the government as to what that time frame might be although, of course, we're looking for something that is measured in, I would say, weeks, not months.

As I alluded to earlier, the situation that a student faces where they are coming to a decision to go approach a school administrator to ask for the invocation of, an establishment of a GSA is a very, very serious time in their life. We're told by the Education minister that two weeks would be too prescriptive. However, I think that in the context of the seriousness of the decision that the student is making, we have to realize that this student is in crisis. They're hoping to avoid crisis. It's a serious, serious matter, and it's a matter of an emergency.

In the same way as one would treat an individual arriving at an emergency ward in an ambulance, one drops everything and treats that individual. I would say that it's a triage situation in a school that deserves the highest order of attention. It's not as though a student is coming to a teacher to get help in a certain subject matter, where they're failing science and they're afraid they might not get into university or where they think they need extra help to study in their algebra course, or they don't believe they're going to make the

basketball team, so they've got to go to the gym teacher to get extra practice time. This is a situation where the person's life hangs in the balance and their future hangs in the balance. Having faith in the system is absolutely essential.

I know that the Education minister has repeatedly said that this legislation would be the strongest in the country in protecting the rights of the student to come forward and demand that a GSA/QSA be established, that there wouldn't be a situation where that demand could be denied, yet there are no teeth in the legislation which would make it mandatory for that administrator to, in a timely fashion, establish a GSA/QSA. In fact, there are no timelines established in the legislation.

I haven't heard yet from the government or other members across, haven't heard anyone defend the government's omission of a timeline in a way that convinces me that the legislation is acceptable without one. I am not convinced – and I don't believe I can be convinced – that this legislation is safe, effective, or useful without a timeline. It forgets the whole reason behind establishing a GSA, and that's to provide a safe space for students who wish to come out under their own terms.

The students who are considering the option of establishing a GSA and coming forward and taking advantage of this so-called protection that the government thinks it's offering under the legislation are going to think twice before exercising that option because they know that there's a possibility that the administrator could just ignore it or just delay it. It could go on for weeks or years. It's been mentioned by other speakers that that history has been shown to be true, that students have asked for a GSA/QSA and that it's been not months but years of requests.

I can't imagine many students being able to pursue a request for the establishment of a GSA or a QSA over that timeline. It's got to be only the strongest and most convinced in their belief who would be able to withstand that type of an onslaught against their right to establish a GSA or a QSA, months and months and months of waiting. Boy, that individual who went ahead and still pursued the application and demanded that their rights be respected after months and months, more than a year – in some cases, I heard, up to six years where the student was trying to establish a GSA, a QSA: that's a dubious amount of time to expect a student who is in a crisis situation to actually wait. Most people, of course, will have dropped the pursuit, will have given up, will have been despondent over the reaction from their administrator or principal to not grant to them their right.

*11:50 p.m.*

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

We are on amendment A5 to Bill 8. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen to speak.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to stand up once again to speak in favour of the amendment. I really wanted to refer to this portion, actually, of the survey I mentioned a few times before when I rose to speak in favour of the amendment, but I refrained from reading the notes from this survey. I would really like to actually refer to some of the notes provided in the survey.

The survey was conducted by Egale Canada Human Rights Trust. This survey was conducted with over 3,700 students from across Canada. The study was commissioned by Egale Canada Human Rights Trust and funded by ECHRT, with additional support from the University of Winnipeg Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant competition and from sexual and gender diversity: vulnerability and resilience, a research team funded by Canadian Institutes of Health Research. This is a huge survey, a 21-page survey.

I just wanted to read what it says about GSAs. The survey notes: GSAs are official student clubs with LGBTQ and heterosexual student membership and typically one or two teachers who serve as faculty advisors. Students in a school with a GSA know that they have at least one or two adults they can talk to about LGBTQ matters. The purpose of GSAs is to provide a much-needed safe space in which LGBTQ students and allies can work together on making their schools more welcoming for sexual and gender [minorities] . . . However, using the acronym “GSA” to represent any student group concerned with LGBTQ matters has become commonplace.

There’s a lot to actually read to give references from this. I just wanted to refer to this survey and their findings and their definition of a GSA.

When we have spent two continuous days and a few hours on this amendment and the numerous examples and facts in support of this amendment from my colleagues the hon. members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-McClung and the experience shared by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, there was really a hope not long ago – not long ago – in this House when the Education minister rose and showed some, you know, compassion for or commitment to the concerns that they have in common.

As I said before, what we were trying to do – we have different views. We have conflicting views over Bill 8. What we are proposing in this amendment is not really going to address all the questions and concerns that the members of the opposition have been trying to raise on Bill 8 for the last three weeks. Also, they’re not going to address all the questions and concerns that were raised by the LGBTQ2S-plus community. All we’re trying to actually do with this amendment is to strengthen the provisions in the bill. The government believes, actually, that they’re proposing something in the bill to strengthen the security of the LGBTQ community in the schools.

Also, you know, we have been very adapting to listen to the Education minister on her findings or her consultations that she wanted to share. She shared with us that the people that she had the experience and, you know, the privilege to speak with found that something was very, very prescriptive, that something was hard to work with, and that the term that was used in the legislation, “immediately,” was something that the principals and the stakeholders that she spoke with found too prescriptive, too hard to work with.

Immediately after that, you know, the opposition whip and hon. Member for Edmonton-North West rose and made a reasonable offer, that what we are trying to do as a positive opposition is that we’re trying to provide a positive argument, that the amendment, the argument, could actually serve the spirit of the provision that the government is actually trying to table through the bill. They feel they’re providing the solution through those provisions that will provide the protection to the community.

I just wanted to refer to the experience of the Premier. The Premier has served in many different positions, political positions in the government, portfolios in the federal government. One of those I closely know was the portfolio of citizenship and immigration. During his tenure in the federal government he made numerous changes to immigration laws, whether you agree or disagree with those. He made changes to cancel applications and made new applications under different categories. You could have, you know, different opinions on that, you can agree with something or not, but what I wanted to stress on this: every single change that he was bringing in on those immigration laws was not without any timelines. Even when he proposed the cancellation of applications, there was a timeline. Even when he proposed new changes, new

categories, he always had a timeline actually stipulated in the legislation.

*12:00 a.m.*

Then the Education minister rose not long ago in the House and said that this is something that she heard from the school stakeholders, I will say, that it was too prescriptive for them, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you know, very factually has given the examples of the different schools, from the large schools from his riding to the small schools across the province, and their ability to work on very different extracurricular activities and implement the plan in a given time frame.

We were even open to the government House members: what time frame do you want to offer on this? It seems like that was just another political retreat. This is starting to show that, and we ended up going this way. I believe there is still opportunity in this House to show the leadership, show the collective leadership as the government has many times retweeted and affirmed in this House that they believe in the LGBTQ community protection. And if the House really doesn’t feel that two weeks, the proposed time in this amendment, something is not to be – you know, they’re feeling committed to support something. The members on this side of this House have reasonably given an offer to the government House. What time frame do you want to offer on this amendment? We all believe that without stipulating a time frame, you cannot assure that the requests coming forward will really be relied upon.

Without stipulating the time limit, this legislation is too broad. It leaves it to the person, you know, to trust how they want to interpret it or how serious they want to be on this. The person might not have any interest to form the GSA or QSA in schools, so they can basically sit back for months, for years, and there will be no accountability and there will be no oversight.

All we are asking is to complete at least the provisions you have proposed in this bill. So if you don’t have any alternate to this, I think this is a reasonable offer. Then I ask all House members and I encourage all House members, if there is no – I just wanted to remind that the members of the government House do acknowledge that the time frame is important to this provision. So if they don’t have something reasonably in their minds, they’re most welcome to support this amendment. If something they feel, based on their consultation, their experience, conversations – if they can offer something alternate to this, then they can come forward, and we are willing to discuss this.

If they do not have anything to say on this, then I will once again be brief, without going into 21 pages of survey completed by the reputable institutions in Canada, and ask all the House members to support this amendment. Please support this amendment if you don’t have anything to say to this. If you don’t have anything to offer on this, then do come vote for this amendment.

I will be brief this time. That’s all I have to say. Once again, I’ll encourage members. As you already acknowledged the spirit of the amendment, then I will encourage you to support and vote for this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

On A5, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in favour of this amendment. As I reflect on the many GSAs that I have visited over these last number of years, I reflect on the enthusiasm that I saw in every corner of the province in talking about how GSAs started in different schools around the province, in different towns and cities, you know,

sometimes in unlikely places as well. I mean, I guess I shouldn't be suggesting what's likely or unlikely, but when I reflect on perhaps some of the strongest, best-attended GSAs that I've visited over the last number of years, a couple of them come to mind straight away.

The first one would be in Olds high school in Olds, Alberta. The Olds high school is a wonderful, wonderful facility that shares space and a roof with one of the buildings of the Olds College complex. You have this, I guess, synergy between the high school and Olds College right there. I love that partnership that they have made between the schools. The kids are already sort of physically on a college property, so the concept of moving on to postsecondary education is just literally – right? – staring them in the face every day. You know, it adds to sort of a campus kind of feel to the high school so that the kids are perhaps edified by that in their behaviour, and their focus is maybe assisted by the fact that they are literally on the Olds College campus.

In that school I saw a tremendous GSA formation that, you know, really brought in a lot of kids from lots of different backgrounds. Don't forget that, of course, a GSA is an alliance as well, so you have kids that are there because they want to be allied and show solidarity – right? – with the LGBTQ community and so forth. This GSA worked on lots – they still do, I'm sure – of different social justice issues: raising money for developing nations, selling different products to raise money for projects in different countries, learning and educating the general population, including the high school and the college on different social justice issues. It's not just LGBTQ-plus issues but also other things that they choose to discuss along the way.

You know, in regard to establishment, once the GSA started in Olds, it's like it gained a life of its own. Sometimes this is the way things can go for student activities in general and GSAs specifically. If you can nurture it and make it easy and normalized to establish and ask for a GSA and get it in a timely fashion, then the rest of it follows itself quite naturally. The one in Olds, in particular, I know had strong support from the administration of the college as well, and they were represented in the meeting that I went to at the Olds high school GSA.

*12:10 a.m.*

Again, it's like if everybody enters into the process in a positive way, then the establishment and the timely establishment takes care of itself, quite frankly. You know, it's not like you are twisting people's arms to start a GSA. Rather, the environment we created over the last few years has made it much easier to do so, and I think that's something we should all be proud of and something that we should nurture and buttress with good legislation to let people know that we care and that the provincial government is there to make sure they are supported in every way.

It was only a couple of years ago, I guess, not even that, when I first met up with Jane MacNeil from Calgary. She would probably be in high school now. But she was in a situation where she was trying to start a GSA in the school that she was in and having a tremendously difficult time and then moving over to a public school and finding suddenly, like a breath of fresh air, being completely supported every step of the way. What happened also, simultaneously or perhaps around the same time, was that we did pass Bill 24 here in this Assembly, and the doors just opened, quite frankly. I know that, for people like Jane, starting a GSA in a school suddenly just became so much exponentially easier.

I learned an important lesson in regard to Jane's story specifically. You know, I think that Jane was feeling tremendous pressure and anxiety, as all young people do from time to time, but then suddenly had the support of the school and had the support of

the school board and found it very easy and straightforward to start a GSA, show leadership – right? – and allow that to flourish, I believe, in Forest Lawn school. I think that's where it was that this took place.

Again, there are literally hundreds of stories like this around the province. I think about Wetaskiwin public school. Again, by being able to have a supportive school board and a safe and caring policy that disseminated from that board, the establishment of a GSA in Wetaskiwin school was straightforward and easy. They know what the rules are, they know what the parameters are, and then away you go: a timely establishment of a GSA. I know that the guidance counsellor in Wetaskiwin public school was very, very pleased to have provincial support, you know, and the clarity so that students' confidentiality is respected. Also, the clear parameters around the establishment of a GSA made it easy. Clearly, the guidance counsellor knew very well that there were lots of kids that could benefit from that. I believe that probably that GSA is continuing to move along and continuing to serve kids in a positive way.

I mean, GSAs from year to year at a school wax and wane according to the membership and who's coming in and who's graduating. I think we can see that as a normal thing, just like the basketball team might be so great in Hanna one year and then the next year, you know, they don't do so well, right? They get beaten by Delia even. It's possible. I think about Delia because, of course, we are building a school there, and it's going to be awesome. I'm excited about that. But my analogy is that once the GSA starts, it's not a matter of saying, "Oh, well, it looks like it's maybe starting to die out" because there are no kids for a particular year, but these things, once you start them, then become normalized, and it's easy to be picked up by other kids coming along the way.

When we're talking about establishment and timely establishment, I think we have to think about, you know, the legacy that we're creating and leaving in a school and the benefits that are derived from having a GSA in a school for all the kids, right? They can see that very vulnerable people are being looked after and very vulnerable young people have the support of the school, the school board, and the teachers and everybody, and everybody feels the benefit of that.

Another very interesting GSA that I had come to visit is in Lindsay Thurber school in Red Deer. This is a very interesting one because this was perhaps one of the first GSAs to be started in the whole province of Alberta. They had a very strong tradition of social justice in Lindsay Thurber high school, so they've led the way in lots of ways around GSAs and GSA organization and so forth and helping other schools to establish GSAs as well.

But, you know, again, the very first time, without coherent direction from this provincial government, the establishment of the very first GSAs, like in Lindsay Thurber, was not easy, right? You needed an extraordinary leadership. I know that there was extraordinary student leadership from a teacher at Lindsay Thurber that persevered, quite frankly, without provincial legislation to support, but he did a great job, and that is a real source of, I think, pride. If MLAs want to visit a place where kids discuss, again, all kinds of social justice issues and political issues and just the state of the community and school, then the Lindsay Thurber GSA is the place to go. I learned a lot by going there, both from the history of the alliance and the direction that students and teachers take from that school.

Another one that really sticks out for me, of course, I think, is Jasper Place high school. Jasper Place is probably perhaps the biggest high school in the province, right? It has, I think – Edmonton-South? – probably more than 3,000 students at least. I believe you were a graduate there, which is nice. We have two

Jasper Place graduates in our caucus. It's, again, a very dynamic GSA that I think helps to set a tone for the whole school so that you literally have this club that, you know, some people join, and it has more membership or less membership from year to year, but the very existence of that club, I think, helps to set a positive tone for all 3,000 students or more because they can see that this is a safe place and that you're creating a safe haven for students in the GSA.

I think that it helped to precipitate lots of other interesting clubs that do function in Jasper Place. If you go to their clubs day, I've never seen so many choices around, you know, things that you could join, from sports to different language clubs, different cultures, and then right in the thick of it all is perhaps one of the strongest GSAs that I know of in the province, again, just contributing to the fabric of a school and normalized over time. So the key is to have the timely formation of a GSA, and then the rest of it takes on a life of its own in a very organic and, I believe, positive way.

Perhaps one of the most unique GSA formations is what we find in the Spruce Grove community GSA, okay? This is almost like a super GSA that was created not from one particular school but from community members, encompassing many schools and many thousands of kids that live in the area from both Catholic and public and private schools and maybe a charter out there – I can't remember – in Spruce Grove, so a community GSA. It's very interesting. I mean, it falls outside of the Education Act, of course, but, again, you can see how there's an organic sort of creating a need that will find its way over time. Literally, they will find their way because people can see a demonstrable need and benefit from a GSA. Spruce Grove just spontaneously popped out with a community GSA. They participate in public events and a parade and so forth, and they meet at the community hall. It's a pretty dynamic thing that I think, Mr. Chair, we should acknowledge.

12:20 a.m.

Anyway, my point is, again, that this amendment helps us to have a timely number in place, and if there's a commitment and school boards and schools are backed by provincial law, then they will find a way. It's always what happens. I've never met a school board anywhere in the province that doesn't want to follow the law. I mean, that's a pretty basic tenet of schools and school boards anyway because they help to teach what laws are in the first place and help to establish the fabric of a community. Obviously, if we have this amendment where they are compelled to have the formation of a GSA within two weeks, Mr. Chair, I would suggest that we would have compliance and enthusiastic compliance right across the province. All of these wonderful examples that I just described in places like Olds, Red Deer, Edmonton, Wetaskiwin, and Spruce Grove we would see replicated in many other communities, and I believe we would all be the richer for it, quite frankly.

I can't remember if this is amendment A5 or amendment A6 now, but I think the amendment speaks for itself. It's strong, and I believe it serves its purpose very, very well, and I'm hoping that everyone will vote in support of the amendment. I know that I don't want to take up the time that I can pass on to another one of our members. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I know that he always likes it when I kind of open up and just, you know, tell a bit about GSAs and the timely establishment thereof.

You know, another place where I think I saw very interesting GSAs and the establishment of them in a very timely way was in southern Alberta as well, both in Lethbridge and in Medicine Hat. You see a lot of sort of regional collaboration that helps to support one school to another or even one town to another or city to another. I think that by having laws that compel the timely formation of a

GSA, you could really help to nurture that sense of community and co-operation.

You know, I was a teacher for 20 years, and I know that part of what you would see happening is that the culture of a given school year gets started very quickly in September – right? – or late August and so forth, so when you're building a student activity schedule, you want to generate that enthusiasm and get things going straight away at the beginning of the year. That kind of sets the tone for the whole year, and students start to build their schedules, habits, and friends, you know, what they choose to join right from that first couple of weeks of school. By having a two-week period as this amendment suggests, I think that fits in really well with how the atmosphere or the conditions of a high school are established right then in that late August, beginning of September, that first couple of weeks, right?

If there are kids that might want to start a GSA or QSA, then they need to be nurtured and to be accepted straight away. Just like when somebody starts the cross-country running club, right away after September you've got to get in there and start running, man, because you've got to be ready for the meets that take place at the end of September and the beginning of October. And it's the same thing with other clubs and student council and chess club and all that kind of thing, right? Again, having the GSAs being backstopped by a time-sensitive or timely establishment of a couple of weeks really fits in with that same dynamic, like I say, that you're trying to create at the beginning of a high school year.

Again, I encourage everyone to consider amendment A5. I think it speaks for itself, and I will hand over my time and place to another member perhaps from across the way, you know, that would like to let us know more about their feelings on the timely establishment of GSAs here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

On A5 I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to rise and speak to this very important amendment. I mean, it's something that I think is very important because we need an amendment that brings some stability for students – right? – and this amendment I think the Member for Edmonton-North West spoke quite a bit at length about, about how it does bring in some of that stability. It allows students to know that when they request it, it would give them that two-week timeline and that they would be able to have that two weeks to start beginning to have their GSA.

I mean, on the idea of stability I do want to maybe let some of the members across the way know, maybe the Member for Calgary-West, I believe it is, and the members for Calgary-Hays and Central Peace-Notley, that I've just looked at my calendar. Actually, I'm going to be here till the end of it. I've cleared my whole weekend. I'm happy to stay here and debate this amendment as long as we need to, Mr. Chair. So I'm looking forward to having that discussion for as long as we need to, and I'll be right here in my chair getting up every opportunity I have.

I mean, I'm looking forward to talking about how certain schools may need that little extra push to ensure that they have a GSA established and that a reasonable timeline should be enacted upon these schools. I'm looking forward to debating how important it is that these schools have those restrictions. When we looked at certain schools – and I spoke to it earlier – not every school but certain schools, that view GSAs as something that's a sin or that view GSAs as something that's the work of the devil, we know that nobody in this Chamber believes that. But we know that it's important that we have a GSA in all of those schools, especially the

ones where the school environment may make those students feel unsafe and may make those students feel excluded.

We know it is very important that when a student requests a GSA, it's on a reasonable timeline. I think the Member for Edmonton-North West spoke quite eloquently about how there is a bit of a cycle around how schools operate and that there's a bit of a timeline that things operate at. If you join the chess club in September, everybody joins at the same time, and you sort of get to the same place by the time you come to December or June or whatever it is, Mr. Chair. Certainly, I think that a GSA benefits from the same type of stability, and the students having the ability to request a GSA and know that that stability will be in place is very important. I hope members of the government understand that.

I hope they understand how important it is that we don't leave students with the impression that they aren't able to have a GSA if their administrators want to drag their feet. I mean, I know members opposite don't wish that to be the case. I know members opposite don't want that to be the end result of this bill, but I think that we need to make sure that we make a bad bill better. We need to spray a little bit of Febreeze on the bill, give it a little bit of a touch-up, and that's what I think this amendment does. It allows us to have a little bit of a change. It allows us to have a little bit more stability for those students, a little bit more certainty so that those students understand that when they request it, within two weeks they will have a responsible adult that will be inclusive, accepting, and accept that they are gay, accept that they are queer, accept that they are transgendered, or whatever it may be, Mr. Chair, that they are LGBTQ2S students and that they are supported. That's something that I think is very important. I think it's very important that we recognize this in this Assembly, and it's very important that we support this in this Assembly, and this amendment would allow us to do that.

I mean, it's something that when we look at the history of what the legacy parties of this government have gone on, it's been very interesting. The legacy parties in this Assembly voted in support of Bill 24 when it was first introduced, and now the Education minister claims that these updated regulations and legislation are the most comprehensive ever, except we see significant rollbacks from Bill 24.

*12:30 a.m.*

One of those was the timeliness, the timeliness of when a GSA must be established. We understand that the minister spoke about how some superintendents found it onerous or prescriptive to have an "immediately" clause, and that's why we've come with a "two weeks" clause, right? That's why we've said that two weeks is a reasonable amount of time. It gives you time to go out and find a parent or a liaison or a staff member, whatever it has to be, that'll be able to organize these students, able to have them have a safe space, and able to support them in a safe space. That two weeks, I think, isn't too long; it's not too short. It's sort of the Goldilocks zone, if you would. I mean, it's something that gives the superintendents or the principals or whoever it may be enough time to actually go and review that situation.

We know that if suddenly it's taking six weeks, eight weeks, 10 weeks, 12 weeks, and so forth, something has gone wrong, that these schools are now abusing a loophole in the system to try and damage the rights of these students. We know it's not a large number of these schools that are doing that – we know it's only a very, very small percentage of these schools – but we need to send a signal to these schools today, we need to send a signal to those students today that those students will be protected, that those students will be protected by this Legislature, that their lives are valuable. Their sexuality does not matter, and they are valuable:

that's what we need to tell them right now by supporting them and saying that if you want a GSA, a QSA, a safe and inclusive space, we will provide that. That's something that we should be easily able to accept in this House.

It's something that I think we'll be happy to keep debating and moving forward here. It doesn't make much sense when we look at the provisions of Bill 8. It speaks at length to ensuring that inclusion groups are accepted. I know that's the minister's preferred name for them. I know the minister doesn't like the names "GSA" or "QSA," but those are protected names in the legislation, Mr. Chair.

The timeliness of having them established is just as important as actually giving the permission. The timeliness is important. If an administrator chooses not to move forward expeditiously with the enactment of the club, you could have a request come in in September, when the school year starts – you may have a new gay student or whatever it may be, Mr. Chair – and if the club is not approved until June, well, the school year is actually over at that point. Students have now left school. We know that that is absolutely possible, that that is absolutely something that this legislation without this amendment would allow. It's something that we should work to fight against, it's something we should work to fix because it's absolutely a minor flaw in this legislation.

I mean, I'll be the first to admit that sometimes you don't get perfect legislation the first time, and we can fix it. That's what the process of these amendments is, that's what the process of Committee of the Whole is right here in this Assembly, and that's why we're able to debate this. I really have to wonder what the intention of the government is if they don't wish to fix this minor flaw.

This is something that we've spoken to at length now, about why it's important that students have that timeliness, whether it's stability, whether it's so that they feel safe, whether it's so that schools don't drag their feet. Whatever it may be, we understand that it's very important that these students actually have the means, not just the protocol written down on a piece of paper but that they actually have the means, to establish these GSAs and that these GSAs are actually allowed. We think that it's important that these GSAs are actually allowed to move forward.

I mean, I think it's important when we look at the GSAs and what they do. The Member for Edmonton-North West spoke a little bit about a GSA that I actually attended when I was in high school, the one at Jasper Place high school. Again, one of the best things I remember about that GSA is that every week they would have a movie night, Mr. Chair. They'd have a movie night, and they'd have cheap popcorn. I'd go after school to the film studies room and watch a movie with some friends and eat some popcorn. That's the type of safe space that we want to expedite and ensure that teachers and principals aren't able to drag their feet on, right? We want these kids to be able to have that community around them in at least two weeks.

Two weeks isn't a short period of time; it's not a long period of time. It's the right amount of time to allow these students to move forward. It's the right amount of time to ensure that these students are able to have the structures in place and that the administrators will have the structures in place. They'll be able to find a staff member that's willing to organize a GSA or a QSA. They're going to be able to find an outside person, if they have to, that's willing to organize a GSA or a QSA. That's an adequate amount of time, Mr. Chair, I believe, two weeks. It's something where, if an administrator needs to make a few phone calls, that gives them that opportunity.

I think it's very important that we look at the history of this and why the government members and the ones who were here in the 29th Legislature would have voted in favour of Bill 24 and

supported stronger protections than this, indeed, for GSAs and QSAs and gay kids across this province and why now they would vote to repeal those. I think that's a very contradictory action, Mr. Chair. I think that accepting this amendment would rectify some of that contradiction. Not all of it, but it certainly would rectify some of it. This amendment would allow us to bring back some of the protections that this government seems so intent on rolling back. It would allow us to bring back some of the GSA protections that this Bill Hate, the Act to Destroy GSAs, really goes after. I think that's something that all members should be happy to do, especially the ones that were here before, in the 29th Legislature, that supported the original Bill 24 and supported having stronger protections for gay kids.

Unfortunately, it seems that the government is intent on rolling back those protections and not having strong protections for gay kids and, really, leaving gay kids out in the wind, Mr. Chair. That's something that I think is a little bit unfortunate.

We can look at some of the history here and see that in March 2005 the hon. Premier actually opposed a children's book about having two dads. Actually, I'll quote it. He said: it's wrong to confuse children. Mr. Chair, I think that isn't something that members of this Assembly agree with.

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Chair, point of order.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. Minister of Transportation, I believe that you may want to change seats.

#### **Point of Order Language Creating Disorder**

**Mr. McIver:** Okay. I'll do that.

Mr. Chair, the hon. member is trying to create disorder in the House. He's not talking about the topic at hand. Under 23(j) he's attempting to create disorder, and he's succeeding. I'll keep standing up as long as he carries on this way.

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

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We've already had a ruling from yourself and another chair as well on this point of order. I am creating context for the debate, and I wish to continue to do that. I'd ask you to rule the same again.

**The Deputy Chair:** Given that this amendment has a long history in this House, I think that it would be prudent, based on previous rulings, to ensure that the hon. Member for Edmonton-South choose the course of his debate in a way that may not follow the same path as has previously occurred within the context of the debate on A5. At this stage I don't find a point of order and consider the matter to be closed.

If the hon. member would please continue, having taken into account my expressed wishes, that would be a great way to move forward. Thank you.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm always happy to seek your guidance in this Assembly, especially when we are debating something that is so fundamental to our province, something that is so fundamental, with historical context, to being able to protect these students, to being able to protect these vulnerable youth, and to being able to see where people across party lines have pledged their support in the past and whether they have supported gay kids or acted to out them.

That's something that I think is very important, that we continue to move forward and fight for in this House. I think that it's something that our opposition here will continue to fight against in this House, against the agenda that being gay is somehow wrong or that being gay is somehow confusing. I think that it's something we are very excited to be able to stand here and debate. Something that we are very excited about is to be able to stand here and propose this amendment A5, that makes this bad bill better. The amendment: we've spoken at length about how this two weeks is adequate time for administrators to be able to have those changes.

We talk about the concern that we're hearing. I mean, I have a little bit of a story for you, Mr. Chair. It's somebody who I've known for many years now that this actually happened to. The type of school district that we're talking about when we're talking about dragging their feet and the importance of timeliness: that's the context I'm trying to bring to this debate here tonight.

One of the people I knew taught a grade 1 class. They were a teacher in a rural school district. I won't say which one, and I won't name any names, just to protect their privacy here. Really, they were a teacher in a rural school district, and they had a couple of years of experience, and they'd been teaching there and were looking to move up in their career and, hopefully, move into a more permanent contract and have some stability in their life and become a long-term teacher and move up that grid. As we know, they're part of a union, Mr. Chair.

*12:40 a.m.*

Now, what happened to this teacher was that she was teaching at a Catholic school, right? It was a Catholic school in a rural district that was I wouldn't say a small board, Mr. Chair, but a medium-sized board. One of the things that happened was that she was living with her boyfriend at the time. They had a little apartment downtown. They were a very normal couple. They both went to church every week and did all the things that a normal couple would do, went on dates and whatnot. But what happened was that somebody at the school discovered that she was living with her boyfriend, and they told the administration, one of the other teachers. They said, "Well, that's actually not a Catholic lifestyle; that's not within what the school considers a good, Catholic lifestyle," and she was actually summarily terminated.

I mean, I know it's not the exact same situation, Mr. Chair, but the reason I tell this story is that she was actually put back in her career quite a bit. She no longer had a job, very frankly, and she had to go and find another job and explain why she'd been fired before despite being a baptized Catholic. What this amendment does is that it prevents school boards like this small board, a relatively small board, from using the idea of not being in a good, religious lifestyle to drag their feet on establishing GSAs. It's organizations like this and administrators like this who are concerning for this legislation. It's concerning that they would try to terminate people who don't agree with their values.

We know that GSAs and QSAs and gay-straight alliances and being gay and being included as a gay person can sometimes contradict with administrators' values, and if those administrators are allowed to delay, if those administrators are allowed to drag their feet, just like in this case, just as in this case they were allowed to fire my friend the teacher, then we will see situations where kids aren't protected. We will see situations where kids are actually allowed to be outed. We'll see situations where kids are being forced to appeal to the Public Interest Commissioner or the Privacy Commissioner, being forced to appeal to the administration, being forced to appeal to the courts. Mr. Chair, that's something that I think is very unreasonable. I think it's unreasonable to expect our students to have to do that. I think our students should have the

reasonable expectation that if they make a request, then administration will honour it in good faith.

I'm not saying that any administrators wouldn't want to do that, but I'm saying that there are certainly a very small minority of cases where this has happened before in the past, and we have a duty here to act to prevent it. We have a duty here to act to prevent those types of ideas from moving forward. People who believe that having two dads is wrong and will confuse children: we don't want those types of people making decisions about whether GSAs should be formed in schools. People who believe that marriage is open to everybody as long as they are a man and a woman: we don't want those people making decisions about whether GSAs should be established. GSAs, we know, reduce the rate of teen suicide. We know they improve mental health for gay and straight students, and we know they help increase inclusivity in schools. We know that this is something we should be fighting to protect.

I've heard over and over again from members of the government caucus and from some members of the government front bench that they support GSAs, that they support the concept of GSAs and the idea of GSAs, but I don't understand why they wouldn't then support summarily implementing these GSAs in a timely manner, why they would then support saying: well, we support GSAs as long as it only takes two years to set up. That can't possibly be logical, Mr. Chair. It can't possibly be what the members opposite mean. I wouldn't pretend to understand or know what they are thinking or what their motives would be, but certainly I think that members should be able to say that if we do support GSAs on one hand, then on the other hand we must also support establishing them in a timely manner. Two weeks is more than enough time for a school district, an administration, a principal, whatever it may be, to do the due diligence required to establish that GSA.

It's very simple. You either understand how important this is and how important it is that the GSA is established quickly, or you don't care about what the risks are. You either understand how important this is for the kids, or you don't care. Mr. Chair, it's that simple. It's so simple that, in fact, this amendment should have been voted through hours ago, but unfortunately the government doesn't seem to want to move that way. They don't seem to be supportive of this amendment, and I can't understand why.

The minister has gotten up and said that she supports GSAs. The minister has gotten up and said that GSAs are important and that we have some of the strongest protections in the country but has left this glaring loophole that this amendment tries to fill, this glaring loophole that you can drive a truck through, that administrators could drag their feet on. This amendment would fill that loophole and prevent those problems. It would allow us to have meaningful GSAs in this province. It would allow us to have QSAs and GSAs that actually were established within reasonable timelines. That's something that I think we all should support in this Assembly, especially if we purport to support GSAs.

If we are willing to stand here and say that GSAs and QSAs save lives – we understand they save lives, we understand that they are important, and we support GSAs wholeheartedly, as I've heard in private conversations with some members of the government caucus who have told me that, that they really do believe in what GSAs are doing – if those members honestly do believe in what GSAs are doing, there is no reason to also not say that those GSAs should be established expeditiously and that those GSAs should be established in a reasonable time.

That is one of the most fundamental things, Mr. Chair. You don't go out and say: well, we're going to give you this ability, but you only have three years in high school, and it's going to take us two and a half years to approve it. That's not how you create a safe and

inclusive space for students. That's not how you create a space that works for students. That's not how you create a space that works for gay kids, for lesbian kids, for bisexual students, for transgender students, for two-spirited students, or any other identification. It is not how you go out and support those kids.

You seem to be indicating, if you leave this loophole open, through you, Mr. Chair, that you want people to take advantage of it. We've identified the exact problems that have happened in the past and will continue to happen in the future. If we now know that this problem exists, then we must endeavour to solve it. If the government does not wish to solve the problem, then the question is: why? Do they simply not understand the ramifications of the loophole, or do they not care about those students? That is a very important question because it speaks to what this government's act to destroy GSAs, Bill Hate, will do. It will absolutely attack young students. It will attack young, vulnerable Albertans, and that's something that I think is very important that we get on the record here tonight, that we actually talk about how important it is that timeliness is included in this bill.

When we talk about having the strongest protections in the country, as the minister would say – and the minister says that – I don't believe it, Mr. Chair, because we've significantly rolled back the protections. At the very least, those protections should be required to be implemented within a reasonable time frame. Without this amendment those requirements, that are supposedly the strongest in the country, don't have to be implemented. Now, that is what's ludicrous, this loophole that you could drive a truck through.

Without having the timeliness clause, we will absolutely see the bill not being implemented, the rule of law not being upheld. That is something that members of the government should be very concerned about because their jobs, indeed, in this Chamber, Mr. Chair, are to ensure that the rule of law is upheld and to ensure that we actually have our legislation followed. If they don't understand that, that's something that's very concerning, or if they just don't care, that's even more concerning.

I really think that it's important that they get it into their heads, Mr. Chair, that perhaps they listen for just a few seconds and understand that it will hurt students if they don't pass this amendment. If they don't understand that, then they need to listen to the stories that have been told by so many members of the opposition, that are being told all over social media, that were told by the students who walked out of their classrooms and were right here on the steps of the Legislature, both this time and when Bill 10 came around, about how important these timeliness clauses are to actually making students safer, to actually saving lives, to actually protecting our kids.

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

I see the hon. Member for St. Albert rising to speak.

*12:50 a.m.*

**Ms Renaud:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be here and talk a little bit about amendment A5. It seems fairly straightforward, looking to add a timeline. You know, we had an earlier amendment that looked at adding the word "immediately." I guess that didn't fly, so we're going to try for "two weeks," which seems fairly reasonable. I think it's important to note that the reason that we did this in the first place was that there was some history and some reports of some schools where for whatever reason the administration or people that were in decision-making positions sort of dragged their feet, so if and when they were asked if they could form a GSA or a QSA or whatever they chose to call it, there was a delay.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I can't say if that was on purpose or not, but there was a delay. Like my colleague said just a couple of minutes ago, when you recognize that there's a loophole in legislation and you can see the impact of not remedying that hole, you do something about it. That's why we're here. That's why I'm here, and that's why I'm actually happy to be here on the late shift.

Now, I'm a human being. I stopped doing shift work years ago. I used to do shift work as a front-line worker many, many years ago, and it does take a toll. I'm certain that people are tired and have families and constituencies and events. However, there are times in our lives, I think, when there is something that is important enough to say: okay, I'm just going to stand here, and I'm going to do what I need to do to join my colleagues to just talk about why this is important.

Let me just add one more thing. This is really about youth and children. I wholeheartedly believe that our youth and our children are our most precious resource, all of our children, not just mine or the kids I know or relatives' kids but all of our children, every single one of them: children that are part of the LGBTQ2S-plus community, kids that have disabilities, kids that are new to Canada, kids of whatever religion they practise. Every single child is important.

We know that there are loopholes in Bill 8, the legislation that this government wants to put through, and we know how easily we could fix those loopholes by just letting people in decision-making positions know that when a youth or a child, or maybe you want to call them a student, asks for this support, the person in charge should do something about it immediately – I imagine it takes quite a lot of courage to even ask; I've not done that myself, so I don't know, but I imagine it takes a lot of courage – and if not immediately, in two weeks. You know, stuff happens – I get that – and jobs are busy. But it seems like a really reasonable amendment that we do this, that we fix this.

I'm going to take a quick moment to talk about one of my constituents, and the reason that I'm going to do that is that I think we can all agree in this House that we can't possibly know everything about everything. We can't possibly know everything about every bill or piece of legislation or direction that we talk about in this place. It's impossible, so we rely on experts. Whether they're scientists, researchers, people with lived experience, whoever they are, we rely on experts. I just happen to have a really amazing expert that calls St. Albert home. I've had the privilege, actually, to get to know him over the years on different issues. His name is Dr. Kristopher Wells. I'm sure that people have heard of him. I think he is now an associate professor at MacEwan University. He's a newly appointed Canada research chair for the public understanding of sexual and gender minority youth. That's right: he's an associate professor at the Faculty of Health and Community Studies at MacEwan University and serves as co-editor of the international *Journal of LGBT Youth*.

He's actually a pretty amazing man, and he's a researcher. He's a scientist. He also has lived experience. When he speaks to us and when he talks to us about what we're doing and what we need to do, the direction that we need to go, I think we should listen because I don't believe that we here in this place would have more insight than Dr. Wells. I'd just like to talk about some of the things he said. This is fairly recent. He shared his thoughts on June 27, 2019, and he did an opinion piece. It's entitled *Bill 8 Will Make Schools Less Safe for All Students*, and I will table that at the next opportunity. I'm just going to summarize some of his points.

What he said was about proposed changes to the Education Act with the recent introduction of Bill 8 in this place.

The new minister of education continually proffers how Bill 8 will provide the strongest legislative protections for GSAs in Canada, while other political parties, educators, and students argue that Bill 8 represents a significant rollback on important protections and supports for both LGBTQ students and teachers. That's pretty straightforward.

Specifically, Bill 8 removes the requirement that principals immediately grant a student's request to start a GSA and appoint a staff member, in a timely fashion, to supervise the group.

I think that Dr. Wells' comments sort of underline the importance of approving this amendment or even of talking to us about the amendment. I'd certainly like to know if you're not even going to think about this. Maybe just tell me why. Do you know better than Dr. Wells? Is there something that we're missing? Is there some research I didn't catch? I think we're hearing from an expert, a scientist, a researcher who is telling us that these things need to happen.

Bill 8 also no longer guarantees that students will have the right to call their clubs a [GSA or QSA] . . .

I think we've all talked about that at length.

. . . without obstruction or undue influence, and removes written clarifications protecting the disclosure of GSA membership.

That's pretty important.

Well, it's been a long time since I've been in junior high or high school, but in this job I have actually had lots of opportunities to meet with junior high students and high school students. You know, to be quite honest, when I went to school, I'd never heard of a GSA or a QSA. That wasn't something that in my time I had ever heard of. Even when my son went to school, it wasn't something he talked about. He never mentioned that. My daughter is younger than him, obviously, and she did, and she had some understanding of why they were valuable.

When I think back to when I was in school, I went to a lot of different schools. My family moved around a lot. I don't have an exact count, but I think I went to, like, 13 different schools. I'm not even kidding. My parents weren't even in the military. They just moved a lot, so I went to a lot of different schools. You know, you're sort of the new kid every time you go to a new school, so you spend a lot of time observing, and what I did notice was that in a lot of the places, a lot of the schools that I went to, particularly one, you could tell when some of your classmates just acted differently. Maybe they looked different, dressed differently, spoke differently, and quite likely they were members of the LGBTQ community. Maybe they had not come out, maybe they had. Those were the students that you could just see struggled all the time. All the time. They were the ones that got made fun of or picked on or tripped, all of the horrible things that happen in schools. I don't want to focus on that because there are so many amazing things that happen in schools, but those were the kids that were the most vulnerable.

In this new job, when I started to meet students, younger students, and started to hear about GSAs, particularly one of the groups in St. Albert called Outloud – it's sort of a GSA in a sense; they have a group for younger students and a group for older students, and they meet in the evening – what I heard from them was just nothing special about the actual club. Like my colleague said, they probably watched a movie, had a bake sale, had a pizza, talked about maybe a teacher they liked or their boyfriend or girlfriend or friends or whatever. But it made them feel safe, and it made them feel like they weren't alone, and isn't that sort of what it's all about at the end of the day, that you don't feel alone?

So it's been sort of a learning experience for me. I didn't go to school when there were clubs like this. I do see the value of them now, and I see it when I talk to the students. I know I've said this

before – and I've tabled the letters – but in May I received 60 letters from students from a junior high in St. Albert, Lorne Akins.

**Mr. Bilous:** Sixty?

**Ms Renaud:** Sixty, yeah.

Most of them were addressed to our Premier. I don't know if he read them. I hope so. They were addressed to him. Some of them were incredibly heartfelt. Some of the students sort of shared their own story about coming out or their fears about doing so when the time came. Some of them talked about wanting to support their friends. But they all talked about why it was so important to have a club, to know that it was a safe place and that no teacher, no adult would force them to do something before they were ready to do so. They implored the Premier to actually listen to their words. You know, these are junior high students, so it's actually pretty interesting. A couple were a little bit swearsy and got off on the whole marking thing, but we'll save that for another day.

**1:00 a.m.**

What I did learn, I guess, is that consultation sometimes doesn't always look like what you think it looks like, like renting a hall, having coffee and snacks at the back and speakers and microphones and Post-it Notes. Sometimes consultation is just about listening to the people around you or reading the notes that get sent to you, or, you know, sometimes they'll reach out. Sometimes it's just at events. But I don't think that they could have been any more clear at all about what they wanted and why they needed it and how it helps.

I'm going to go back a little bit to Dr. Wells, who takes it to, I think, a place that we need to focus on; that is, on knowledge and research and science. That's what he is. He is a researcher.

**The Acting Chair:** We need to get focused here on amendment A5, essentially with regard to timeline establishing, and I would encourage you to do so. We will move to general debate on the bill after we're done with amendment A5. So if you could proceed in such a manner.

Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** I will absolutely focus on why this amendment is so important: to add protection for students, for LGBTQ students, so that if they request a GSA and a QSA, that is granted no more than two weeks from the day the request is received.

That is how Dr. Wells frames his argument. That was one of the very first things he said in this piece on his research, that one of the most important things is that immediately after that student is brave enough to ask, they're supported and it happens immediately.

What he tells us, again to quantify the things he said earlier, is that

over 20 years of global peer-reviewed research indicates that LGBTQ youth are among the most vulnerable groups of students in schools today, with significantly higher rates of substance [abuse], smoking . . . depression, self-harm . . .

death by suicide, all of those things. We all know that. I hope we all know that. I hope we've all listened enough to these debates to understand that.

These risk factors are not because of who [these students] are or how they identify. They are the compounding product of discrimination, harassment, and prejudice, which all contribute to the development of unsafe school environments.

Again, I think that we're incredibly blessed in this province that we have amazing schools and we have incredible educators and we have incredible administrators almost everywhere. But we all know – right? – that there are places where things don't always happen

the way that they're supposed to happen. Going back to the amendment, it's important that when you recognize there's a loophole or there's a way for someone to potentially be harmed, you do something about it.

. . . research shows that GSAs are a vital public-health intervention, which not only creates safer school climates for lesbian, gay, and bisexual . . . youth, but also for heterosexual youth. One very recent study from the University of British Columbia, which included over 39,000 students in grades 7-12, found that the longer a school had a GSA the greater its protective power was for all students.

Well, it sort of makes sense, doesn't it? I think that if a school is setting a tone and doing it within two weeks of being asked to set that tone, what it will do is that it seeps to the rest of the school and it seeps to the rest of the students in that school. They benefit.

I want to give you another example. One of the things that I know about why it's so essential to facilitate the correct inclusion of students with disabilities is that not only do they have the right to learn and experience life just like anybody else, but it actually is a really positive thing for all of the other students. That is what's so amazing about inclusion, integration, whatever you want to call it. When you do it properly in schools, whether it's elementary school, preschool, even daycare, actually – there are some amazing daycares. Well, I digress. Let me focus on this. When you include a student properly in school, the other students benefit. They benefit in a lot of ways. I think they learn a lot about life, and they learn a lot about the differences between human beings, that we're all very different. We all see the world through very different eyes. Real inclusion takes effort every single day. It's rough, and it requires a commitment, a constant commitment to getting that done.

I think that for members opposite – I can remember being there, listening hour upon hour. I can't remember exactly which bill it was when I was first introduced to the filibuster. That was an experience. Oh, hey. I lost my spot.

What I want to say is that I don't know why members opposite wouldn't just look at this amendment and say: "You know what? It's not about winning or losing. It's not about how we have the great big mandate and we're going to just steamroll and go through and do this." It's about listening to what we're saying. We're saying that this has the potential to just remove a lot of stress and potential problems, potential harm. It has the ability to do some really good things. So what? You amend something that isn't great. Nobody is perfect. Everybody makes mistakes.

We have researchers that are telling us that this would make it better. We have real students that are telling us that this would make it better. I don't know what else you need to know that this is a good thing. Other than that, there's something else going on that I just don't understand. There is a reason that the government is committed to refusing to acknowledge that this particular amendment, A5, is actually something that could improve your legislation. I'm not saying that it's perfect. There are some pieces that are pretty good. There are some pieces that I would support. There are certainly some things that I have issues with, and this is one of them.

I guess that it's ultimately your choice to do that. It's your vote, but I think it's important to know that it is your vote and that you do represent an awful lot of people. So as you consider this amendment, a very simple amendment to encourage whoever the decision-maker is, the administrator, principal, whoever that is, when they get a request from a student – and I can't imagine the guts that that takes. I keep saying that, but I really can't imagine going to someone with that kind of authority and power when you're uncertain to begin with and asking for something without being sure that you'll get it. That takes a lot of guts. But when they

go ask, that they be granted this within two weeks: that seems reasonable.

It's just a club. It just supports people. It just supports students. That's all. I don't understand the reluctance to change something that people, Albertans, are asking you to change. I don't understand why the refusal to even consider it, actually. I don't get it. Research unmistakably indicates that GSAs make schools safer, so why would this government seek to limit, weaken, or reduce the implementation even if you're doing it sideways through legislation that's not really clear, even if you're doing it sideways by creating loopholes?

I believe that we should strive to increase support and amplify the impact in all of our schools and all of the lives of our students as opposed to diminishing at all. This isn't passed yet, but we currently have fairly strong legislation. The language is very, very clear. It's not up in the air. It's not open for debate. It's that if you are asked for this, here are the steps that you must take to support this student and the students who are supporting the student, their allies or their friends.

Unfortunately, this bill does exactly the opposite of what this government is proclaiming it will do. If passed, the schools will become less safe, policies more vague, ineffective. Both LGBTQ and heterosexual students will suffer long-term consequences.

**1:10 a.m.**

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to comment on amendment A5? I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning to you, or good evening, I guess, depending on your point of view. It's a beautiful 1 a.m., and we are now talking about I believe you said amendment A5, just to make sure that I'm up to date on that. We have this amendment before us because we are looking to try to take weak language – there's a section in Bill 8 specifically around GSAs, QSAs. The language being proposed here is weak, and I think this language that we have here in this amendment will make it less weak. I say that because language is so, so important. I know the Member for St. Albert was touching on that a little bit, on why it's so important.

I know that our Education minister has talked about at times how important it is to make sure that our students are looked after, that they have everything that they need, and that every single child is important, but the problem that we have with that statement and what we have proposed in Bill 8 in the language around GSAs is language that is not as strong as what we have right now. What we're potentially looking at here is a step backwards, which I'm not sure protects students the way it's being claimed to.

Essentially requiring a GSA to be approved in a two-week period I think is incredibly reasonable – incredibly reasonable – so here we are trying to maybe meet them part of the way here. We think it should be established absolutely immediately. There's no reason that you can't say yes to one of these. But you know what? Here's an honest effort to reach across the aisle to members and to the Education minister and say: "Okay. Look, we'll meet you part of the way here. How about two weeks? We can get an approval within two weeks."

I know that when the Member for Edmonton-North West was the Education minister, he found that there were challenges with some of the schools around forming proper language encompassing GSAs, QSAs, which prompted him to have to improve the language. So if we had challenges around what we had before what would then become Bill 24, going back to this language that we

have right now here in Bill 8 will start to open up those floodgates to those challenges again. If we're so intent to make sure that we're going to protect our students, allowing language to go backwards is not productive.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I guess, Mr. Chair, I just struggle around this, you know, why we would want to make a conscious effort to backslide and create weaker language. I can't help but ask myself: if you're in charge of the education system here and you know full well that language is a major component of the education system – you know how important it is – when you change words, you change how that language reacts. To consciously make a decision to introduce Bill 8 with the current GSA, QSA language in there and purposely make it weaker, then I have to wonder if you really do understand how language works, which then leads me to the possible question of: if you don't understand how language works and how this amendment could improve it, then I, unfortunately, have to question your ability to oversee the education system.

If that indeed is not the case, then the next logical question I have to come to is: are you now purposely ignoring that the language being proposed here in Bill 8 is weaker? That, unfortunately, is a whole larger problem in itself, if you're making a conscious decision to ignore that. What I'm seeing here is, unfortunately, the government saying one thing and now doing yet another in Bill 8. This is our attempt to try to make weak language less weak, because our students are worth it.

Again, I have 26 schools in Edmonton-Decore. I think I have some of the most fantastic students in the entire province – I'm sure there are probably 86 other MLAs that might debate me on this a little bit – and they're all in Edmonton-Decore. I have a lot of them talking to me. I have students that participate in GSAs and I have students that don't participate in GSAs talking to me, I have teachers talking to me, and I have trustees talking to me about the proposed language in Bill 8 being, well, essentially flawed, full of loopholes, some so large that – I think I might have said this before – I could probably fly the space shuttle through them from the back seat.

Saying things like, "Well, the privacy laws will protect the students" is, like I'd said before, great. It's a nice safety net. The problem is that it kicks in after the fact. So a student who is not ready to come out to loved ones or friends or whatever the case may be has now just been put into a position of having to fight to correct the damage that's already done. To consciously make that decision to put those kids at risk: are we just taking some dice here and rolling them and hoping we don't come up on snake eyes? That doesn't make sense if we've made the commitment to protect every single child no matter where they come from, no matter what their economic background is, no matter what they identify as.

I'd be happy to know which one it is from my previous questions. Do we not understand how language works, or are we ignoring that language? As the opposition I think we have tried to make some very common-sense amendments here, just like we have here with A5, to establish a two-week limit in which to approve a GSA. I know, as I said, that I have some amazing staff within the schools of Edmonton-Decore – and here I go; probably another 86 MLAs are about to debate me on this – and probably some of the best principals in the system are in Edmonton-Decore. I know they're busy, and they do a fantastic job, so I think a two-week period to approve a GSA is reasonable. I know you get busy. Things happen. You might put it off to the side for a second. I understand that. I can live with that.

We have to take the weak language and make it less weak. I'm hoping that members in this House are giving very serious consideration to this amendment, because so far the pattern that I've seen, unfortunately, is that they're not. Again, do we not understand how language works, or are we purposely ignoring it? I think I might have talked about this earlier. I've got this nagging feeling: could we be pandering to a small group of special interests or donors? I don't know. I really, really wish I could shake this feeling. Accepting this amendment is certainly going to help me to do that, but at this point the pattern I'm seeing is not.

**1:20 a.m.**

It kind of falls back to that whole thing that I was talking about around history. We learn a lot from history: what's happened, how we can not duplicate mistakes. Very clearly, I think what history will find is that if we keep the language that's currently being proposed in Bill 8 around GSAs and QSAs, it's going to come back to bite us. How many unintended consequences? I think those were the favourite words I used to hear all the time: unintended consequences. The problem is that the unintended consequences are individuals.

You didn't seem to want to protect teachers, which is too bad. Again, we've got some of the most fantastic teachers, I think, anywhere in the world. They deserve protection just as much. But our students, our young emerging leaders, the ones that are going to take over after us: it's amazing what some of these kids do, Mr. Chair, when they are supported and promoted for who and what they are.

I have a very good friend from high school, back when I attended Jasper Place. He's, luckily, a very aspiring actor. He's been doing very, very well for himself, and one of his children is transgender. I've done my best to try to follow his daughter on Facebook and some of the things that she's been up to. She has become an incredible activist and speaker around these kinds of issues, but that was because he supported her from the very moment. Because of the openness that was available in his family, his daughter felt comfortable to come out, and it's just been an incredible life that I've seen growing in this young emerging leader.

Every single student that we have has the right to the same kind of a future, but what we're proposing here in Bill 8 is weak language that will put that at risk. You know, we've heard that it's going to be just like language in other jurisdictions. Why are we aiming to be average? If our kids are that important, we should aim to be the best, number one, ahead of the pack, leading the way. I think that this amendment, asking for "two weeks," is at least a step in that direction. A lot of people think that we're heading down the wrong path here. I'm sure that they'd like to see this amendment go through and add "two weeks."

But there's still the whole overarching concern. I mean, my gosh, I hear kids tell me: "Why do they hate me so much? What have I done to them?" A kid wondering why their legislators hate them for proposing this kind of language: how did we get to that spot, Mr. Chair, when supposedly we have their best interests at heart, when we are trying to create the environments for them to thrive, for them to lead on the world stage, not just here in Alberta, not just in Canada but on the world stage? It baffles me.

As I said, I can't help but wonder: do we not understand how language works, or are we just simply ignoring it? If we are ignoring it, then I think we have a whole larger problem than that. I certainly hope that we're not going down that road. Seeing the fact that some of the amendments previous to A5 have been shot down, I can't help but wonder if that's where we're going.

Let's make a conscious decision to provide all of our kids in this province the chance to thrive, that loving environment, that

accepting environment, so that they can grow and blossom into individuals like I'm seeing with my friend's daughter and the superstar that she is becoming. Absolutely amazing. Some of the kids that I know I've heard my colleagues talk about: I really think those are superstars just waiting to happen as long as we don't interfere with the environment that we've already managed to create for them.

We have right now the strongest language in the country to protect them, bar none. To put that at risk by bringing in weaker language is nothing else but a step backwards. We have people questioning the motives of some of our legislators in this House around what their intentions are towards GSAs and QSAs: their words, not mine. I'm essentially just the messenger here. But this is a common message that I'm hearing from colleague to colleague to colleague to colleague. It's a common message.

Hundreds standing out in front of the Legislature protesting, kids feeling the need to skip classes to go out on the street to protest: how much more evidence do we need before we tap on the brake, hold up what we're doing, and ask: why is this happening? This was well in motion before we started debating this, so it tells me that our young emerging leaders have a good handle on language and know the history behind why they felt they needed to fight for this. I, for one, Mr. Chair, am not going to let them down. I will keep standing here going over and over this.

Simple amendments like adding "two weeks" to approve a GSA or a QSA: this is not unreasonable language. It's not unreasonable at all. My sincere hope is that members of this House will accept this language and extend the olive branch to members of the community. Let them know you're actually thinking about them, because they feel that there's an ideological drive to push them down, you know, to stop them from becoming what they could be. I have seen some very amazing people over the last couple of months, the stories they have told me, the dreams that they have. We're going to interfere with that over "two weeks," over language saying: "is granted no more than two weeks from the day the request is received"? It makes absolutely no sense.

**1:30 a.m.**

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

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud rising.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise this morning to speak to amendment A5 to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. This amendment is actually, I believe, another opportunity for the government to demonstrate what they have been saying is the case for some time now, and we're providing an opportunity for this government to essentially stand up and actually commit to a timeline for the establishment of GSAs in schools.

An amendment I put forward last week to the bill suggested that the government accept an amendment to the act to allow for the immediate establishment of GSAs upon request. As we all know, that amendment was voted down by the government. Thirty-two government members voted against that amendment. Unfortunately, we did not even hear any debate from the government about why, so I think this amendment should be seen as another opportunity for the government to speak to why they have concerns with the timely establishment of GSAs in schools.

I certainly am hopeful. I realize I'm coming in, and I know there's been some plentiful debate on this side of the House already on that issue. I'm hopeful that we'll hear from some government members as well as to why they – well, hopefully, they will actually support this amendment. That's what I'm optimistic about, because it is a very reasonable amendment, and it is intended to be consistent with

what we're hearing the government say is their intent, which is that they are not trying to block the establishment of GSAs and that they support it. I think this is an opportunity to demonstrate that to Albertans.

I'm hopeful that those MLAs on the government side will rise and speak to why they support it or, alternatively, why they do not, because I think that that is what Albertans need to hear. There's been some criticism, I know, from government members that they believe that the members on this side of the House are perhaps stoking fear, but I think that that fear stems from the fact that there is an absence of debate and discussion from the government, on the other side, to demonstrate why they would be opposed to such a not only common-sense amendment but a very compassionate amendment. There really is no basis for refusing this, and if there is a basis, I would offer the opportunity to the government members to articulate that, to let Albertans know why they would object to the timely establishment of a GSA instead of letting, you know, Albertans and members on this side of the House supply the explanation for them. They don't seem to like the explanation that we've provided, so I implore the government to give us an explanation.

I do note that, you know, the hon. Minister of Education introduced this act into the House. In committee she said in this House that she knows "that timelines have been mentioned several times when it comes to creating a GSA," and she said that she wanted it to be clear that "school authorities are expected to follow the law." I take her at her word on that. I believe that she does expect school authorities to follow the law. The challenge is when the law is weaker than it was before. That sends a clear signal to school authorities that there is a weaker expectation of them.

I stood up in this House a number of times and talked about how, legally, statutes are interpreted as well as how, even as lawyers, when we're trying to interpret the application of legislation, we will go back to debates in *Hansard* and debates of the Members of the Legislative Assembly to try to understand the intent behind legislation and why it was introduced. In this case, as the Member for Edmonton-North West eloquently described, it is important to note that we are moving, if we go forward and Bill 8 is passed, to weaker legislation, and that speaks to an intent by the government to weaken the legislation, to weaken the provisions and protections for GSAs. It's important to note that what is in the School Act right now is much stronger protection, and we know that to be the case.

In this House we've had a lot of discussion about the fact that there are other jurisdictions in this country that have other provisions, whether it be by policy or by legislation, that address GSAs, and for a while there the Minister of Education took the stance that what was in the Education Act are the strongest protections in the country for GSAs. She was proven to be incorrect when members on this side, particularly the Leader of the Official Opposition, demonstrated that there are many jurisdictions that have significantly stronger, more comprehensive protections around GSAs.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. I just want to ensure that we are, at this point of the debate, sticking to amendment A5. There will be, obviously, ample time to debate the bill as a whole. I just want to make sure that we focus ourselves in towards the amendment at hand.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be doing that.

What's important here is that we shouldn't actually focus so much on comparing, in my view, our legislation to that of other jurisdictions, but we should be comparing ourselves to what we currently have, and what we currently have in legislation in the

School Act, which has been the law, is stronger than what is currently being proposed by this government. In particular, where it is stronger, it is stronger with respect to the requirement that school authorities immediately establish a GSA.

What's being put forward in Bill 8 removes that immediacy requirement, and that is a clear signal to school authorities shifting from – we can't talk about interpreting this legislation in the absence of what was currently in place. It will be compared. It will be compared, and it will be interpreted as being that, while we have stronger protections right now under the School Act, the signal from this government is that it is weakening it. School authorities are not required to immediately establish GSAs when requested by a student, and in fact school authorities can take their time and can stall, and that is exactly what we knew was happening and why Bill 24 was introduced.

This is an opportunity for the government to accept that they do support the establishment of GSAs by putting a timeline on it. Two weeks is a very reasonable timeline, especially when you think about what is required to actually establish a GSA. It requires a staff member and a space – that's it – something that all schools have already. In fact, I've spoken to some of the schools in my riding, and one of the junior highs in particular said that they don't have a GSA because one has not been requested yet, but they have staff members eagerly awaiting the request for one because they are ready to be their school support and their staff support for that GSA.

It's all that's required, one staff member to stand up or be directed by the school administrator, by the principal, and a space. It only requires one student to know that they have a supportive staff member. For that one student that can be life changing. We've talked about in this House, significant times, the importance of GSAs.

It doesn't take long to establish a GSA. Not much is required. Two weeks is actually probably much longer because, really, as soon as a student requests it, you could establish one the next day. But two weeks I think allows for some time to make sure that there's an appropriate staff member to do so, and it's a very reasonable accommodation to fulfill the intent that the Education minister has stated that she has, which is that she does support GSAs and that she does expect school authorities to abide by the law.

I would actually like to take this opportunity to read an e-mail that I received from a constituent specific to this timeline question. This is from a young man from my constituency who is now a young adult and is in university. He spoke to me about the importance of the timely establishment of a GSA.

*1:40 a.m.*

This is what he wrote to me in his e-mail. He said:

As you already know, the question of time frame is one that I feel is left unaddressed by the UCP Education Act. I did not really accept my own orientation until the end of Grade 12 and started coming out to friends. It is often said that the first person that you come out to is yourself, and certainly this was true for me. I've heard some LGBT people say on the radio that they knew they were gay when they were 5 or 6, but I think many youth share my experience of desperately wishing that they weren't gay due to societal and familial pressures. Things like LGBT representation in the media and – indeed – having gay-straight alliances help reduce this internalized homophobia and, as studies show, contribute to improved mental health outcomes. Even the presence of GSAs sends a message. I don't think I was comfortable enough with myself in high school to attend a GSA meeting, but seeing rainbow-colored posters in the halls was incredibly validating and helped me feel a sense of belonging in the place where I spent half my waking hours. Given that the end

of high school is really when many people begin to step into their identities, the question of timeframe is essential in letting GSAs have a real impact. If a Grade 12 student has to wait a year for red tape to clear within the school administration, it has become a moot point for them. These students are real people . . . who are already facing increased risks of familial rejection and social stigma.

I think that entirely sums up the issue right there. We can't predict when students will need the support of a GSA. Some may do it earlier. Some may feel comfortable. Some may seek the support. Some may be able to come out to their peers earlier than others. Some take a little bit of time. This constituent was indicating that he didn't come out until the end of grade 12, and he said that if there had been an approach by a student to a school administrator to establish that and the school administrator dragged their feet, he would not have been able to access a GSA. This is critical, and this is not a hypothetical problem.

The amendments that came forward from the NDP government in Bill 24 came forward because of a response to a very real problem. They came forward because students and administrators were telling the government that school administrators were dragging their feet on establishing GSAs. We know that to be the case. By signalling to school administrators that the requirements of GSAs are weaker, this government is letting them know that it's okay to drag their feet, that it's okay to stall, that it's okay to try to discourage kids, encourage them to take some more time to think about it or suggest counselling or even the very, very tragic suggestion of conversion therapy. We're telling school administrators: that's okay; you used to be required to do it immediately, and you don't now.

The implication there is: take your time and discourage children from requesting GSAs and from joining GSAs. I don't think that that's the message that this government – well, I hope that's not the message that this government is trying to send to school administrators, that it is okay to stall and to drag it out and to make it more difficult for kids to seek the life-saving support that they need.

I'd like to tell a story, too. Actually, it's a very recent one from the campaign. It just resonated with me. We've talked about how the kids who need GSAs may come from families that aren't supportive, but this was a story that I heard during the campaign where, actually, the family was incredibly supportive of LGBTQ issues and had conveyed that regularly to their children and indicated that they're allies and indicated that they support them and love them no matter what their identity or their sexual orientation is. This was on the radio. It was a story by Kathleen Smith, who is actually well known in Alberta as a commentator and an advocate for LGBTQ issues. She told the story about how her own child, even coming from a family that she knew was supportive, knew was open, knew would love her no matter what, still felt more comfortable first coming out to her peers before coming out to her family, first sought the support of a GSA before coming to her family only because that's how she came to her realization, that's how she came to her own personal journey of coming out.

This really resonated with me because I think it's important to note that the kids who seek out supports in GSAs don't do it only because they don't have support at home; they do it because that's how they're choosing to come out. That's how they're choosing to express their identity, and we have to support them to do that. I thought it was a very important story to listen to for all Albertans, to highlight the need, that GSAs are important for all kids no matter the religious background, no matter the support of their family.

If we want to support kids, as I know that this Minister of Education has stated repeatedly that she does, I think that it is the timely establishment of GSAs that shows that we actually want to carry through and give meaning to those words of support. We want to make sure that kids know that when they need support, when they want it, however they seek it, whomever they seek it from first, whether it be school staff, whether it be their peers, whether it be their family, they have to make that choice. The most important lesson that we've learned about supporting LGBTQ kids is that they need to make their choice about how to do this.

It's also important to note that these kids may choose to tell their parents and also still seek the support of a GSA because we all know – we were all teenagers once – that there are things that we will seek support from our peers for in a way that we won't be able to seek support from our families even if they're great, loving, supportive, welcoming, caring families, as I hope most of us had. But there will always be that need for peer support in a way that parents might not be able to provide. Why would we deny children the timely access to that level of peer support?

My husband is a high school teacher at an Edmonton high school – he's actually an assistant principal – and we talked a little bit about the GSAs in his school, and he talked about how much he valued not just the kids who identify as queer or trans who join the GSA but the kids who identify as straight, because it benefits all of them.

A GSA might not even be requested initially by a child who is identifying as LGBTQ; it could also be a straight student who is requesting the establishment of a GSA because they're trying to demonstrate to their peers that there is a welcoming and supportive environment in that school. Those are the kids who are allies that, again, I also want to support because: what a positive message that sends to all kids in that school, that there is a safe space for them even if they're not ready to come out yet. I categorize myself as an ally, and those kids who at that young age are able to identify as an ally and will advocate for their friends, for their peers: I commend them as well. I want them to be supported as well, to demonstrate to their friends that they are loved, that they are supported, and that they are safe. I think that is something that we should all be encouraging.

One of the things that I've mentioned before is that, you know, if we truly are committed to doing this and to establishing a GSA, there should be no reason not to accept this amendment. I really implore the government members, if they are going to be voting against this amendment, which I'm discouraged to believe that they likely will, to speak to why.

We've also talked in this House – and the Premier introduced a government motion, which has since passed – about the need for members in this House to vote along conscience and to be able to have those free votes, so this is your opportunity. I have not yet heard that the government is claiming this to be a vote on a matter of confidence. I look to my fellow colleagues to see if that has been established. I don't believe it has been, in which case it appears that Bill 8 and voting on Bill 8 is a free vote, is a conscience vote for members across the way.

If that's the case, I encourage and implore the members on the other side to look at their constituents, to look at their families, the people in their communities, and think about why they would object to the timely establishment of GSAs, within two weeks, when a student requests it, because here again this is not coming from the top down. This is not the government or school administrators saying to schools: you must establish a GSA. This is coming at the request of students. Whether it be a student who identifies as

straight or a student that identifies as LGBTQ, these are kids who are requesting it.

I look to all the members and implore you to consider your own conscience in this matter as the Premier has permitted free votes on matters of conscience. To me, this is precisely a bill and a matter that would fall within that category. Why would your conscience object to the timely establishment of a GSA? If you do have a conscientious objection to it, I implore you to stand up and say what that is because Albertans are asking, kids are asking, and we're asking. If we want to dispel the fearmongering and the scare that the government members are accusing members on this side of the House of, I implore you, then, to stand up, say why you do not believe it's necessary for GSAs to be established within two weeks of when a student requests it.

If there are school authorities that are supportive of GSAs, they'll have no problem fulfilling this requirement. It would be pretty simple. We know they do it. As I said, there are many schools – I know one in my riding – that are ready to go right away, as soon as they're requested. It doesn't take long. Schools that are onboard with this, with GSAs, and truly supportive will probably have a GSA established in less than two weeks if a student requests it. The schools that have a problem with this need to be encouraged to do it in a timely way for the children.

*1:50 a.m.*

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, are there any members looking to speak to A5? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South rising to speak.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise again and speak to amendment A5. I mean, I think that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud brought some very important points up and some very important stories from people all around this province. Indeed, we've been hearing many important stories from all around this province from members of the opposition here. I mean, I hope we will hear some stories from the government side on how timeliness is not important to their constituents or to the students in their areas and the gay kids that go to schools in their areas. I think something that we deserve to hear is how timeliness does affect GSAs, QSAs across this province regardless of type of school.

I think it's an interesting question because we established earlier today, earlier this evening, this Wednesday evening, Mr. Chair, that certainly private schools also will have to comply, and we noted that last year 28 Alberta private schools did not meet the GSA requirements. I guess one of the big questions I'll have for the Education minister tonight is: without this timeliness clause, without the ability to say that these schools require two weeks to grant a request for a GSA, without the ability to go in and say that GSAs should be protected and should be granted to these gay students or any student that wishes to have a GSA, for that matter, will the minister indeed enforce against those 28 schools if they refuse to form a GSA? I think that's a very important question.

I think it's a question that speaks to the heart of this amendment because this amendment says that schools shouldn't be allowed to drag their feet. Administrators should have a reasonable amount of time, two weeks, to move forward with establishing a GSA or QSA or inclusion group, as the minister likes to call them.

But we know, Mr. Chair, based on the safe and caring policies that were passed by the former NDP government in Bill 24, that 28 schools are refusing to comply. If they were refusing to comply with safe and caring policies, they will likely also refuse to establish a GSA in a timely manner. If they refuse to establish this GSA in a timely manner, without this amendment, what will the minister do about it? Will the minister allow these schools to go on unchecked?

Will the minister allow these 28 schools, that refused to allow gay students to have protected rights in their schools, to refuse to form a GSA and drag their feet indefinitely if we don't pass this amendment? That's something that I think Albertans deserve to know the answer to.

More than that, Mr. Chair, that's something I think that those lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirited, or queer students deserve to know the answer to. Those are the vulnerable Albertans that this amendment would protect, and those Albertans, those young people, those vulnerable young people are the ones that the minister is charged to protect, indeed, and this bill is supposed to protect them. If we don't pass this amendment, what would the minister do? Would the minister let those kids hang on in administrative purgatory, stuck in red tape land, unable to form a GSA, unable to have a safe space, unable to have an inclusive area where they can come out freely and know they won't be outed to unsafe homes or unsafe communities? That is something that the minister will have to answer for.

The minister will have to have that on the top of her mind when we move forward with this legislation because this legislation explicitly will not address those 28 schools, which have already told Albertans that they will drag their feet on GSAs. Perhaps the government can get up and explain what those schools will be forced to do when they drag their feet on GSAs, because we know it's going to happen. They've already said it in their policies, Mr. Chair. In fact, I believe one of the policies even includes language around the sense that they will only establish a GSA under duress. One of the schools did say that in their policy. In that case, what would the minister do about it? What would the government do about it? The government has a duty to uphold the law, and the law says that a GSA must be established.

Of course, without this amendment, it won't say that it has to be established in a timely manner. Will the minister allow those schools to just drag their feet and let these students suffer, let these young people suffer, and not provide them protections under the Education Act? Is that the intention of this government? I think that is a very important question because now that the government, as they should be aware – and the minister should have access to her department, who has access to all these policies, especially these 28 policies that don't make for the timely establishment of GSAs, especially the ones that say things like: GSAs will only be established under duress. The minister, of course, must be aware of those. Now, if the government wasn't aware before, I've just informed them, and they can find very simply the 28 schools that did not comply with the safe and caring inclusive policies, Mr. Chair.

Does the government intend to let those schools go on and not establish GSAs for students and not work to the letter of the law in Bill 8, or will they accept this amendment and have a system that protects those students? It's one or the other, Mr. Chair. You either understand the harm this will bring to students, or you really don't care, and that is something that is extremely concerning. They have to understand that these schools will drag their feet, and of course it's in their policies, that they say that they will drag their feet. If they don't understand that, then they need to look it up themselves and read and actually see what is in those policies because it's in black and white. Once they understand, I hope they will support this amendment and allow us to have the timely establishment of GSAs in these schools so that they have a tool to actually enforce against these schools.

The alternative is that they don't care about those students. They don't care that those students won't have a timely way to establish GSAs. They don't care that those students will have increased risk of teen suicide. They don't care that these students won't be able to

have QSAs or GSAs in their school and that they may be outed to their parents. They may be outed in the schools. That's something that I think is very concerning. It's very concerning for Albertans. It's very concerning for all members of this Assembly.

Something that I've heard time and time again from members, both in private and on the record here in the Assembly, is that the members of the government understand and support GSAs. So if they understand and they support GSAs, then they should absolutely also understand that the timely establishment, an actual logistical process of being allowed to establish a GSA, is essential. It is essential to having an effective act that works for the interests of all Albertans.

The minister has access to those policies and can see them herself. I encourage the minister to do so. She has many hours here before us. I know that I will be speaking here, over and over again, until the minister understands the ramifications of what not accepting this amendment would mean, Mr. Chair. Those policies absolutely mean that without this amendment these schools would drag their feet and not allow GSAs to be established. It would absolutely mean that these kids would not be protected under the Education Act. If that were the case, the government has to understand that this will increase the mental health issues among these students, and it will cause anguish for students.

The alternative would be, if they understand that but they're willing to vote this down anyways, that they don't care. It has to be one or the other. It has to be that the government either understands or that they don't care. That is something that is fundamental to what we are trying to debate tonight. It's fundamental that we are trying to understand why the government either doesn't know what their bill will do or doesn't care what it will do. It has to be one or the other, Mr. Chair, and both of those: I think Albertans deserve better. Albertans expect better. Albertans expect a government that actually reads the legislation and understands that there are school boards that have already explicitly stated that they will not implement GSAs in a timely manner.

I know that the minister has spoken at length about how superintendents thought the original "immediately" in Bill 24 was too prescriptive, and that's okay, and that's why we proposed two weeks. It's certainly not "immediately" anymore. It gives time to go out and find a staffperson who is willing to support the GSA, and if not a staffperson, then it can be somebody from the outside to do that as well. Two weeks is an ample amount of time, Mr. Chair. It allows students to have that stability and understand that it's important for them.

When we look at these situations where schools are saying that they will only establish GSAs under duress, then I think we have a duty to protect those students who will be forced to try and force duress on their schools to establish a GSA. What does that mean, Mr. Chair? I think the government would actually encourage them probably to go to court then. That's certainly something we don't want our kids to be doing. We want our kids to be in school, learning and feeling safe. If that were indeed the case, the government would, I hope, for the students under the Minister of Education's care – I hope that she would be encouraging them to stay in school and study hard and try and learn in school and not be trying to raise lawsuits to establish GSAs so that they can feel safe at school, so that they can have a timely GSA established, just like in this amendment we've proposed.

*2:00 a.m.*

It certainly becomes clear to us that we need to look at this amendment and that we need to pass this amendment so that we do not force students to try and create this form of duress so that schools can establish GSAs, so that these 28 schools which are not

compliant with the Bill 24 regulations around safe and inclusive schools won't drag their feet on GSAs. We know these schools are out there. We know that they exist. It's in black and white. In fact, it's been reported widely in the media, Mr. Chair, that these schools have said that they will not comply with the GSA/QSA policies.

The minister has to know that those schools exist, and if the minister doesn't know that those schools exist, that is extremely concerning because those are schools that are under her care, that she funds, and that she is responsible for. So she has to know that these schools exist. If she does know that these schools exist that will drag their feet, why will the minister not support an amendment that will force them to uphold the word of the law? That is a very simple question that I think Albertans and this Assembly deserve to know. This Assembly deserves to understand why the minister refuses to pass a simple amendment that would make the law easier to uphold. That is the intent of this Assembly, is it not?

I mean, Mr. Chair, through you, of course, it is our intent to try and have the best and most comprehensive protections for gay students in the country. That is something that the government has said many times, and I believe that the opposition believes the same thing. We do want some of the strongest protections across the whole country for GSAs. But if the minister is aware of these schools – and if she wasn't, she must be now, as I've stated it into the record many times here tonight. These schools exist that have already said that they will intentionally delay the approval of GSAs and that they will not allow QSAs into their schools. That is something these schools have said publicly in the media and in their policies, that the minister has access to.

If that is indeed the case, that the minister has access to them and has not read them, that's concerning. If the minister has read them, then why doesn't she think that they need to be enforced against? Why does she think that these schools should be able to get away with not following the law? That is something that should be very concerning to the minister, that they wouldn't follow the law that she is trying to pass right here in this Assembly, Mr. Chair. That is what is concerning, that the minister either would say that schools don't need to follow the law or that she doesn't know they're not following the law. Both of those would be unacceptable to Albertans.

Mr. Chair, it becomes abundantly clear that the minister either knows about these policies and doesn't care about them or doesn't know about these policies and needs to go do her job to ensure that these schools will have a GSA in a timely manner in accordance with this amendment. She needs to go do her job and tell those schools, through this amendment, that they have to establish GSAs.

If she does know and she's not willing to vote for this amendment, which she knows about now, Mr. Chair, then it means that she must not care that they're not going to follow the law. She must not care that these students will no longer have the protections that she has claimed are the best in the country. We know they are not the best in the country, but she has claimed that. Not only are they not the best in the country; they actually won't be followed anyways. What good is the bill if we don't have this amendment? She knows that schools will not be following the law. She knows that schools will not follow the law without this amendment. It's in the policies in black and white, and it's something that the minister, I'm sure, has been briefed on by this time. It's been almost 10 weeks into her term, maybe over 10 weeks now.

Certainly, there are only about a hundred school districts, I believe, in the entire province, Mr. Chair, and the policies, by and large, are only a couple of pages long each. It's shorter than a Harry Potter novel. Certainly, I hope that the minister would have been able to read the policies in this time and perhaps even just googled: 28 schools don't comply with safe and inclusive policies. I hope

that the minister would have been able to do that in the perhaps 15, 20 minutes I have been speaking tonight. If she hasn't, it's unfortunate that the minister doesn't know how to use her cellphone. But that's okay.

We know that those schools won't be complying with the policy, so the minister has to stand up in this House and explain to Albertans whether she will accept this amendment so that they will be forced to comply with the policy and comply with the law that she is trying to pass today. Or does she not care that they will not comply with the law? Does the minister not care that these schools will be allowed to skirt the rules? Does the minister not care that these schools, which are, by and large, funded at 70 per cent or higher, will not have to follow the same rules as every other school?

That's the real crux of this amendment, Mr. Chair. The crux is that we know there are schools that won't be in compliance. They've already said so. Their names are in the media, the boards are in the media, and we know those schools exist. So why doesn't the minister want to do anything about it? Why doesn't the minister want to accept a common-sense amendment that would fix this gaping loophole? Why does this minister decide that certain schools are above the law?

Mr. Chair, I know that sometimes members of the front bench have difficulty understanding how investigations work and all those things like that, but certainly I think that the minister needs to get out and say that either these schools need to comply or that these schools are above her own laws. That is what Albertans will deserve to know. That's what these young, vulnerable Albertans at these 28 schools who are trying to establish GSAs and QSAs want to know. They want to know why in their spaces they can't be safe. They want to know why in their schools they can't be safe in a timely manner.

This amendment would fix that loophole. This amendment would close the trap, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, it seems like the government doesn't want to speak to it and doesn't want to support it. It's very unclear to me as to why. We've identified several significant issues with the bill, this being one of them, and on this particular issue not only does it allow certain schools to not follow the law, but it also puts kids at risk. It's not just a matter of: the government should be upholding the laws they pass. I think we can all agree that the rule of law is something that's very important to our society. Not only are we allowing schools to skirt the rule of law here, but the Conservatives, who tout being pro rule of law, also don't care about the kids who will be affected by it. I think that's something that should be very concerning to all members of this Assembly, and we should be asking the Minister of Education to get up in this House and explain to us why we are allowing these schools to go on like this, why we are not accepting this amendment so that they would have to grant a timely GSA/QSA. Those are the issues that really come into play.

It's not hypothetical. It's not: well, maybe an administrator would drag their feet. It's not: well, maybe a principal might decide they don't like the name or not want to go find a staff member. We have actual examples of schools right here in Alberta who have said that they will only do so under duress, Mr. Chair. Well, this is that duress. This is that government forcing them to allow GSAs, which the government has said that they one hundred per cent support.

I know that ministers on the front bench have said that they one hundred per cent support GSAs and one hundred per cent support gay kids. If that is indeed the case, why don't they support gay kids in these 28 schools? Why don't they support gay kids in the schools with policies that say that GSAs can only be formed under duress? Why don't they support the timely establishment of GSAs in those schools? That is something the government will have to answer for,

and that's something I hope they will get up and speak to here in this Assembly.

I mean, I think it's very clear that two weeks is a reasonable amount of time to give these schools that have said: well, we'll only do it under duress. Mr. Chair, perhaps if we give them two weeks, they can find somebody on the outside, that isn't part of their organization, that wouldn't have a values issue with opening a GSA or a QSA. That's a reasonable amount of time. That's a reasonable ask of schools, and it would make them able to and actually force them to comply with the law. It's the rule of law. It's something that the Conservatives have touted time and time again, that they believe that the rule of law is important to upholding our just society, yet they seem to be willing to let their friends and donors skirt the rules. They seem to be willing to let these people get around the rules, and that's something that we need to ask about.

**Mr. Ellis:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

#### **Point of Order Language Creating Disorder**

**Mr. Ellis:** Under 23(h), (i), and (j), I will go with: "uses abusive or insulting language . . . likely to create disorder." This is not a matter of opinion. It's a situation where this member is making accusations against organizations, against people who are not in this Assembly, suggesting how they are going to interpret a piece of legislation, possibly, hypothetically. There's no basis for what he is saying right now. We've had to sit here and listen for, for sure, the second, maybe the third, maybe even the fourth time he's spoken on this same amendment. Where he at first insulted the Premier, now he is going after the minister.

**2:10 a.m.**

I think we have already had this discussion with you as I asked for clarification if we are allowed to go after other members. I vehemently disagree that you can personally attack members in this Chamber, and I would cite not only the standing orders but certainly, I'm sure, from *Beauchesne's*, if I was to look for it even a little bit more thoroughly, that you cannot insult other people within this Legislature. This is going beyond what is, I would say, reasonable, and I suggest that you have this member focus on the amendment in question.

I appreciate the time, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Yes. I rise to comment on the fact that this is not a point of order. I appreciate that the member and members opposite may be growing tired of listening to the debate in this House, but it is well within a member's right to talk about the applicability of a bill and how it may or may not affect Albertans and different groups of Albertans.

I can tell you, you know, that we spent four years in government. Members opposite, including the member who stood up on the point of order, went after ministers on our front bench in a way calling for their jobs, going after them in personal attacks over and over again. The Member for Edmonton-South is merely questioning the applicability and the minister doing her job and incorporating this amendment into the bill.

I also believe that this amendment is talking about the timeline within which to allow schools to establish GSAs. When the member

is talking about the value of GSAs, how important they are, how they impact lives, that directly is speaking to the amendment.

As I mentioned, I appreciate that the members opposite may grow tired of debating this bill, but it is one of our fundamental rights in this House to debate as long as we see fit, so it is irrelevant how many times a member on this side of the House has gotten up to an amendment or to the bill.

Again, this is not a point of order.

**The Deputy Chair:** I'm prepared to rule on this. I do appreciate both sides' comments. The government put forth an argument that included an idea that perhaps some of this had already been previously ruled on. I don't accept that part of it, and what I mean by that is that I actually do think that the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has been using language that was intended to arguably decrease the decorum in the House.

I think that in the efforts of making sure that both parties move forward effectively on amendment A5, I would also take this opportunity to remind the member to please make sure that he uses language that he does not believe would incite members in the government, so members on the other side.

I think that, with that, I would remind all members of the House that, again, the goal here is to ensure a debate that moves forward effectively. On that front, then, we are on A5, which primarily does deal with the two-week timeline aspect, and I think that members have taken the opportunity to veer quite a far distance from that aspect of the amendment. If they were to decide that they wanted to debate the bill, then once the amendment has been decided, of course, that will be available to them at that time.

With that, I would ask the hon. member to please continue. You have a minute and 40 on this, but of course, as stated, there is ample opportunity to discuss later as well.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will take your guidance under advisement.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Dang:** Certainly, I'm speaking to how, in the case of these 28 schools, they will have issues with timeliness as per this amendment. This amendment addresses the two-week period in which a request should be granted. Certainly, if a school has stated that they do not wish to do it at all, that would be in contradiction to this amendment, and there's your relevance, Mr. Chair.

Certainly, I think that if these schools are not going to be acting in a timely manner, then this bill should force them to because those are the protections that we are trying to enact through the Education Act as a whole, Mr. Chair. Those are the protections that I think are very important and that the government as a whole should be striving to uphold, to uphold that rule of law.

This amendment would allow us to do that. It would allow us to bring these 28 schools – I believe the Minister of Finance was a board member of one, Mr. Chair – under control and have them implement the GSA and QSA policies and safe and inclusive policies. I think that's something that's very important that we do within a two-week period, that's very important that we do in a timely manner. It's important that we don't let these schools skirt around the law, that we put in a timeline that closes this massive loophole. I think it's something that we need to consider as an Assembly and that we need to hear from the government on. We need to hear government members explain why these 28 schools won't have to, in a timely manner, as per this amendment, move forward with GSAs.

That's something that I think all members of the Assembly will be interested in, and I look forward to hearing from my colleagues.

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

I see the hon. Government House Leader rising to speak to the amendment.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to really quickly rise and recap some of the steps that actually would take place in regard to GSAs under the legislation that has been proposed by the hon. Education minister. I think it's important that we rise regularly, every few hours, to correct some of the misrepresentation of facts, if you will, that are presented by the NDP when it comes to GSAs.

Of note, before I get into the steps of what takes place with GSAs under this legislation, I think it's important just to recap, Mr. Chair, that this legislation, in fact, really has nothing to do with GSAs. It's interesting to see that the opposition continues to present that to the House, that this is about GSAs, continues, unfortunately, outside of the House to tell LGBTQ youth that GSAs will not be protected inside this province, to cause fear. You know, it's one thing when they spend most of their time focusing on the fear and smear of their political opponents, but it certainly is another thing when they spend their time causing fear for everyday Albertans, which I think is disappointing.

Again, Mr. Chair, what happens under this legislation when it comes to GSAs is a simple six-step process that already exists. What would happen right now: first of all, when a student or a group of students wishes to create a gay-straight alliance, there will be six steps that need to be taken, and there are currently six steps that would need to be taken. The first step is that the student or students will ask a staff member at the school to start a GSA. In step 2 the principal permits the GSA. In step 3 the principal designates a staff liaison to support the GSA. In step 4 the student – the student – selects a group name. In step 5, if the principal cannot find a staff liaison, the principal informs both the board and the minister, and then the minister appoints a responsible adult. In step 6, as a student-led group, the students, with support from their staff liaison, plan next steps such as meeting dates, times, and activities.

Now, Mr. Chair, under the existing process, that was put in place by Bill 10, which was supported by the legacy members of this governing party at the moment and was supported by the legacy members of the now opposition party, those are the six steps that would happen. When and if this Chamber sees fit to pass the bill that is before it now, that has been brought here by the Education minister, six steps, again, the exact same six steps, will go through it – and there'll be a GSA – which continues to have the strongest statutory protection in the entire country when it comes to GSAs.

Now, Mr. Chair, people at home would be forgiven, I would say, being confused to hear us go through those steps because if they'd been listening to the opposition for going on close to 35 or 40 hours now – they have spent their entire time while talking about this legislation implying that GSAs would no longer be allowed to exist, that students would be blocked by teachers from this process, and then, from there, spent the rest of their time focusing on personal attacks on members of the Legislature, personally implying that teachers don't care about kids, that schools would not take the steps to protect kids, and on and on and on, when – again the reality comes back – the exact same process will exist, if Bill 8 passes this Chamber, as right now.

2:20 a.m.

Why do members of the opposition continue to come to this Chamber and say the complete opposite? When is the opposition

going to spend some time actually talking about Bill 8? Again, Mr. Chair, it's so disappointing to see the opposition spending their time in this place talking about things that are just not factual. I suspect that their constituents would probably be extraordinarily disappointed to watch the behaviour that takes place by the Official Opposition in this Chamber when it comes to how they debate it. I see the hon. Opposition House Leader laughing about that, and he may find that humorous. I'm glad. I do like it when people find me humorous. I consider myself a funny guy.

But I don't think that this issue is funny. The Official Opposition, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, has an important responsibility. This government recognizes that important responsibility. Many of us who sit on this side of the House have had that responsibility, so we respect it. It's one of the reasons why we're still sitting in here, around the clock, providing the Official Opposition that opportunity to do their constitutional responsibility inside this Chamber. But, sadly, Mr. Chair, the opposition continues hour after hour after hour not to do that responsibility, not to talk about Bill 8, not to bring forward amendments that would actually have to do with the legislation that is before the House in an attempt to strengthen it or have a conversation with the Education minister, who has sat in this Chamber for hours and hours and even engaged in debate and tried to correct some of the misconceptions that the Official Opposition has been presenting to this Chamber. Instead, the Official Opposition continues to ignore what are the actual facts.

Now, Mr. Chair, the last time I rose to speak on this, I pointed out that I think, largely, this has to do with the fact that there's clearly some sort of leadership chaos going on inside the Official Opposition. I think that, you know, maybe the Official Opposition House Leader is preparing for his leadership race or other members . . .

**Mr. Bilous:** You are a funny guy.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** . . . but they should not be . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Through the chair. I apologize for interrupting. I just want to remind all members to speak through the chair.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** My point, though, Mr. Chair, is that hon. members should not be spending their time posturing for their leadership ambitions or whatever is taking place when it comes to an important piece of legislation. There are other places where we can deal with those types of issues. In fact, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, when he was running for the leadership of two parties in the last several years, spent a lot of time using Facebook. That's a great tool to posture for your leadership race. He was really good at videos, Facebook Live. Those are good options for you to consider.

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

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Opposition House Leader.

#### Point of Order Relevance

**Mr. Bilous:** Well, you know, Mr. Chair, what I'd like to understand is how what the hon. House leader is talking about has anything to do with the amendment. When our members talk about GSAs and how they apply, they jump up on points of order over and over again. So I'd love to hear your ruling on how talking about a political party and about leadership has anything to do with amendment A5.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** It is interesting to hear the Official Opposition House Leader admit to his leadership ambitions. My intention is not to talk about the internal working of the NDP leadership chaos, that

you're witnessing. My intention is to point out, directly in response to both this amendment and this bill that we're discussing, that the points that the opposition are bringing forward to this House are clearly about something that is different. What my point is is that it's important that we talk about the actual legislation, not the Official Opposition House Leader's leadership ambition and maybe the launch of his leadership campaign. You know, that I'll be interested to see. As I told you before, Mr. Chair, I'm not an NDP member, so I don't think I'll be taking a side in the leadership race.

Sorry, Mr. Chair. We have to deal with the point of order first. I assume that's where you'd like to go with this. I think that it's pretty clear that the Official Opposition continues to bring forward these types of issues, particularly saying that this is about GSAs. That's the point, and it's relevant to the point of order. Every speech that you have witnessed from the Official Opposition is about GSAs. They've done this repeatedly, for well over 24 hours straight, on GSAs. I'm responding directly to my point or to their accusation that this is about GSAs to make it clear that it's not, and that is definitely relevant to the bill. That's the debate that they've chosen to have inside this Chamber, and we certainly have a right to participate in it.

**The Deputy Chair:** At this stage, obviously, we have been offering a wide swath with regard to debate on all sides of the House. I think that it would probably not be the most effective use or direction of debate for the chair, at each instance where perhaps there was one sentence that may not be necessarily directly relevant to the amendment that we're currently dealing with – for me to interject in all of those cases would probably, in turn, itself maybe lead towards disorder. Obviously, a duty of the chair is to ensure that that doesn't take place.

At this stage I don't find a point of order. I think that if the hon. member would continue, then that would be my decision on that. The hon. Government House Leader.

#### Debate Continued

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the ruling, but I'll also move away from discussing the NDP's upcoming leadership race to go back to what my original point of rising was, which is to make clear again for the record that the legislation brought forward by this government, by the hon. Education minister to this Chamber for consideration by this Chamber, does not change the protection for GSAs.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

This is despite the fact that the opposition continues to want to represent to Albertans that this will stop GSAs from being created, that this will drastically change the process for GSAs inside this province. That, in fact, is just not factual. I would use different words, but they would not be parliamentary. But I think you know my point, Mr. Chair, and that is that the opposition continues to waste Alberta's precious time inside this Legislature, talking about something that is not even relevant to the legislation that has been before this place for days.

Mr. Chair, again, I'm not the House leader for the Official Opposition. I've had the privilege of having that role before, but I'm not now, and we are not members of the Official Opposition. Our job on this side of the House is to take on the role of government. But they have an important job. They should start to take that seriously, stop these repeated games of misrepresenting facts, of causing fear inside communities, of saying things that are just not factual, and actually talk about the facts of this legislation, if that's important to them. For anybody who has taken the time to actually read Bill 8 and understand what is going on, the behaviour of the Official Opposition shows that they actually do not care about

this legislation. Instead, they're focusing on playing political games. That's unfortunate because it's their responsibility to make sure we get the best piece of legislation out of this House, and that's not what they're doing.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

Anybody else wanting to speak to A5? The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I feel behooved to stand and clarify many of the comments that the Government House Leader has made in relation to the debate. Where to begin? You know, it's pretty rich getting lectured about the role of the opposition in debate, yet at the same time the Government House Leader is trying to stifle such debate or at least complain about the fact that we've been on this amendment and on this bill for some time.

You know, I do think that what's interesting is that the amendment, first of all, relates to this bill, so one of the challenges I have with what the Government House Leader just said as far as what we're talking about when it comes to GSAs and Bill 8 and how they're not related – well, as the Government House Leader should know, if this amendment didn't speak to the bill and didn't directly amend the bill, then it would be out of order, and Parliamentary Counsel never would have signed off on it. So I'm not sure where he's getting his facts from. I think the Government House Leader should maybe refresh his reading of Bill 8 to see what exactly is in it and why we've amended it: to ensure that students who want a GSA can have one and have one in a timely fashion.

2:30 a.m.

You see, the loophole that currently exists in this bill is that there is no time allotted or time amount or commitment that needs to take place when a student asks for a GSA. I appreciate that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre talks about these six steps and I believe it was step 2, the principal permits the GSA. In an ideal world, yes, he or she does. We don't know when. We don't know how long it will take the principal. Quite frankly, the loophole, Mr. Chair, is that the principal could delay a decision in perpetuity, meaning that they either intentionally or unintentionally thwart or delay the creation of a GSA. I appreciate that the Government House Leader is going to say that we have the six steps. Well, the problem is that the six steps don't actually necessarily result in the creation of a GSA. Our caucus has been trying to highlight that.

Quite frankly, the reason that we are debating for so many hours on this bill is because we know that it saves lives. We know GSAs save lives. We know how critical they are to the well-being of our youth. I don't have the stats in front of me, but I can tell you that when it comes to youth suicide rates, those that identify in the LGBTQ2S community have and are among the highest rates of youth who take their own lives. That is a crisis, Mr. Chair, and that is something that needs to be addressed. This current bill doesn't address that appropriately.

You know, the government talks about truths versus mistruths. Well, I can tell you that it's in black and white that Alberta had, under our government, the strongest protections for LGBTQ2S youth in the country. Under Bill 8 we don't. Ontario has a much stronger policy than we do.

You know, Mr. Chair, this amendment is a reasonable amendment. All it's doing is putting a timeline around: when students ask for a GSA, they can't be delayed in perpetuity. They can't be put off for years and years and years, and the leadership in a school can't delay creating one until whichever youth is asking for one eventually graduates and: hey, hopefully, we can just get

them out of our hair, and we don't have to have the creation of them. I know that the Member for Edmonton-South had talked about the 28 private schools that, I believe, can still deny the creation of a GSA.

But what's important here is that this amendment – and I appreciate, having been on the government side, that government needs to see reasonable amendments, and we know that sometimes amendments are less reasonable than others, just like sometimes bills are drafted less reasonably than others. This amendment tries to improve a really inherently flawed bill. Again, putting a two-week answer on it really gives a clear timeline for students that are looking for these basic protections, Mr. Chair. In my opinion, this is reasonable.

Now, I will give the government credit to the extent that there have been ongoing conversations about a recognition, I think, that a timeline is reasonable. I think part of the challenge has been that we're asking for a definitive time of two weeks and not just in the near future because, as you can imagine, Mr. Chair, the only people who benefit from wording like that are lawyers because they can debate until the cows come home of what is in the near future or even the term "immediately." Okay. Well, immediately for one person may be in the next two minutes. For another person maybe in the next three months is immediate. Really, what we're trying to do here is to provide clarity to this bill, certainty for our young people.

You know, in the debate that we've had so far, what I think is disingenuous is when the Government House Leader gets up and accuses us of fear and smear when we're talking about the value of GSAs, which is in this bill, and the fact that in its current state, without this amendment and others that we've proposed and will propose, it doesn't do what the government claims it will do. What I find most offensive is when the government talks about how we are trying to induce fear into youth and others around this bill, which couldn't be further from the truth.

If you want to talk about fear and smear, Mr. Chair, you were part of the caucus that sat in this House between 2015 and 2019. When we introduced Bill 6, it was to protect farm workers, but if you actually look at *Hansard* for what came out of the opposition's mouth, it was "killing the family farm," which was patently false.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order.

**The Acting Chair:** Point of order noted.

#### **Point of Order Language Creating Disorder**

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), language to create disorder, Mr. Chair. We watched the Opposition House Leader rise and discuss Bill 6 – a decision has already been made by this Chamber, as you well know – but neglects to refer to the fact that there had to be an amendment that was passed that was forced through by the then Official Opposition, which the Official Opposition House Leader points out that you were a member of, so I know that you are aware of that. That amendment was brought through, and what it did was save the family farm. Just to be clear, for the record, that member was part of a government that directly tried to kill the family farm and family ranching inside our province and, in fact, prior to that was bringing forward a bill that would have killed 4-H and kids' involvement in agriculture inside our province.

Mr. Chair, I'm glad that you are part of a governing caucus who was able to get that amendment passed and save the family farm and family ranches inside this province. Absolutely proud of that. For the Official Opposition House Leader to rise inside this

Chamber and imply that in any way his government was not on track to kill the family farms is not factual. It'll create disorder when he rises and says that.

**The Acting Chair:** Would you like to react, sir?

**Mr. Bilous:** Mr. Chair, that is a joke. First of all, this is not a point of order. The opposition over and over in *Hansard* – and I encourage all Albertans to look at it – talked about how it would kill the family farm, which it would not and did not. I appreciate that the Government House Leader is very sensitive to when we call him on comments that were made by his caucus previously. My point here . . .

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order.

**Mr. Bilous:** I'm in the middle of a point of order.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were done. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Bilous:** Now, what's interesting is how, I think, the Government House Leader is trying to use points of order to create disorder in this House, quite frankly. I'm in the middle of arguing a point of order, Mr. Chair.

This isn't a point of order. This is a matter of debate. My point in this and in that example, Mr. Chair, is that, again, the government accuses the opposition of fear and smear, and when we remind the government and Albertans of tactics that they used that were more closely aligned with fear and smear, then, of course, the government jumps up on points of order. In this case, it's not a point of order to be referencing a comment that was made earlier, but I will keep my comments to the amendment.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

I would just encourage all members to stick to the amendments, stick to this bill. It actually has been found to be a point of order to discuss votes previously held in the House and decisions made by the House, so I would just encourage all members to please stick with the bill at hand. It's been a long, long time, and I know that we're running out of things to say that are pertinent to the bill, but we have to stick to it.

2:40 a.m. **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Bilous:** You know what, Mr. Chair? I have plenty to say on this bill. Believe me, I'm just getting started.

Now, what I will ask the chair: if you wouldn't mind letting me know how much time I have left, please.

**The Acting Chair:** Twelve minutes, 10 seconds.

**Mr. Bilous:** Twelve minutes left. Oh, wonderful. I can talk a lot longer than that. Okay. Well, great. Excellent.

Back to the amendment which, again, collars the time. I appreciate that the issue that we have with this is that the bill right now – again, recognizing that there are provisions in the bill currently for the establishment of GSAs, the real issue and the crux of why this timeline is so critical is because it ensures that they will actually be created when and if they're asked for.

Now, Mr. Chair, I want to talk about the fact that there are schools that, for a variety of reasons, some because of faith, others for other reasons, are not in favour of GSAs and even more so not in favour of calling these after school clubs what they are, gay-straight alliances. They'd rather call it an inclusion club or an inclusive club. Part of the challenge is that we need to name them appropriately

and allow students to name them, not legislators to decide what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. That goes to the very crux of a support group for young people who are trying and struggling with self-identification and then communicating that to people. I mean, I can only imagine the duress that young people are under trying to, you know, figure out how to come out, how to express themselves where they won't be judged, where they won't be criticized, where there won't be detrimental consequences. Members of our caucus have highlighted numerous examples of young people and how these clubs have saved lives.

I mean, Mr. Chair, back in I think it was 2013 the government of the day, when we were debating a motion that was brought forward by a member from the Liberal Party, it was unbelievable how we had spent so many hours debating whether or not students should be allowed to create these after school clubs. To an extent, we're still debating this, which is just mind boggling considering, you know, where we are. In some ways we've made progress, and in other ways I feel like we're in the twilight zone that this is about after school clubs.

You know, one aspect of GSAs that I've never been able to get my head around is the whole parental notification. When I ask people who say that, yes, teachers should be notifying parents: okay; how many phone calls are made when their child joins the chess club or track or soccer? I'm a teacher, Mr. Chair. I never called a parent to say: "Hey. By the way, Sally or Johnny have just joined this extracurricular club. I think you need to know." I think it's quite ridiculous, especially when we're talking about something that is not just sensitive, but the consequences are very, very real. As I noted earlier, what's appalling is the suicide rate amongst LGBTQ2S-plus youth. This is a way to help reduce the harm, reduce suicide rates, to help young people. You would think that there'd be unanimous consent in this House to be taking positive steps forward to ensuring that youth have the supports they need.

Now, I appreciate that the government will claim that the bill does what they're saying it to do. I mean, the reality is that it doesn't. Now, whether that's wilful ignorance or they're under a different impression than what's written and the legal opinions that we have procured on this bill, the reality is that it doesn't.

This amendment, which requires that timeline, ensures that there will be an establishment of these clubs, I mean to an extent. I don't know if one of our other amendments has come forward yet to ensure that there aren't other ways for schools to be able to restrict or deny the establishment of it. Now, this is one of our concerns. If a decision can be deferred forever, that is essentially a way of denying the establishment of a GSA. Now, maybe it's a different way of doing it. It's that the principal or the school leadership can just never get back to the student or the students that are looking for it. You know, for us, if we want to have legislation that truly does protect our youth, then I don't see the challenge in the government accepting this amendment. You know, what it does is provide certainty that when students ask for a club to be established, it will be.

I have an example here, Mr. Chair – this is a great example – from a school. It's a faith-based school, and I say that only because I think that's the position that they're coming from, not being comfortable with allowing GSAs. This was a letter, I believe, that was from 2016, when our government, our then Minister of Education, ensured that every school had policies, which is within the purview of the government of Alberta. In this letter – and if it hasn't been tabled, I'm happy to do that at the next available opportunity, Mr. Chair – the school states that, under duress, they would submit a constitutional challenge on this section of the School Act as far as allowing students to establish a GSA.

The reason I bring this up, Mr. Chair, is that if they have made very clear that they do not want GSAs in their school and that, if they were forced to, they would make a constitutional challenge, then the six steps that the Government House Leader continues to go back to mean nothing because there is nothing enforcing that one step then moves to the next. This is where this timeline ensures that at step 2 the principal permits the GSA. Yeah, they have two weeks to ensure that the GSA can be established.

You know, I may be incorrect on this, but I would love to get hold of the principal of this school and say: if you could defer or delay a decision forever, then, hey, there's your loophole to not having to actually allow students to establish a GSA. This is exactly why this amendment is not only timely, but it's necessary.

If the government is being forthright and truthful with Albertans in saying, "We want to protect young people," then accept the amendment. If you don't accept the amendment, then appreciate that Albertans are saying: "You say that this is what you want. This is an amendment that strengthens it, that ensures that it will be established. Then why are you voting against it when we have over and over again pointed out this major loophole?" I mean, this is significant enough that it basically nullifies the creation of a GSA if principals don't want it in their school. That's a major concern.

2:50 a.m.

I wish that members opposite would see this as a reasonable amendment and accept it. Therefore, we can then move on to other recommendations that we have, trying to improve this bill, to strengthen protections for some of our most vulnerable youth.

You know, for me, honestly, Mr. Chair, I think this is a no-brainer as far as an amendment goes. I wish the government would see it the same. We have clearly articulated the challenges with how it's currently written, and regardless of how many times the front bench gets up and says that they have the six steps, well, we've pointed out in black and white how those six steps will not necessarily lead to the creation of a GSA.

The solution is simple. Vote in favour of this amendment, and we can move the debate forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak again to this amendment. It's been a little bit frustrating. I think it's fair to say that we've been trying to make the argument that this amendment should be passed because we should be concerned about the well-being of gender and sexual minority students in our school system and that by timely enactment of these GSAs, we're protecting them.

But I want to try a bit of a different tack since it looks like we're not getting a lot of traction with the line of argument that we've been making so far. I want to focus my comments on jobs and the economy, which are things that are near and dear to the hearts of all of us and certainly were two of the three key platform planks of the United Conservative Party when they ran in the election. Mr. Chair, please, I hope that the members will grant me a little bit of latitude in developing this argument. Trust me; I will get to why this amendment is important when talking about jobs and the economy. It's just going to take me a little while to develop that argument.

Now, it's been interesting. You know, in question period and in some of the debates we've talked about the budget of the government of Alberta and what we can expect. We have said some things about the current chair of the blue-ribbon panel, Dr. Janice

MacKinnon, and because I'm interested to understand what Mrs. MacKinnon might propose in the report of the blue-ribbon panel in August, I've been reading her book *Minding the Public Purse*, which talks about her experience as the Finance minister of the province of Saskatchewan.

She wraps up the book with some concerns that she saw facing not only Saskatchewan but Canada as a whole in 2003, and one of the concerns that she saw on the horizon at that time was the need to better train our students for working in the knowledge economy. We needed to, according to Dr. MacKinnon, encourage more students to graduate high school and move on to postsecondary education and, once in postsecondary education, to go on to get graduate-level degrees – master's degrees, PhDs – and work in research and development to drive the Canadian economy forward. The countries that do best in innovation and succeed in research and development are going to be the countries that lead in the future, that have the strongest economies going into the future. She was concerned at that time – and keep in mind that this was 16 years ago – at the low levels of high school participation rates in Canada, the low levels of advanced education participation rates, and the really low levels of spending on research and development all across the country.

It's interesting, Mr. Chair. You know, at the time that she was writing, she referenced that Canada, on average, spent about 2 per cent of its GDP on research and development. It's declined since then. In the 16 years since then it's fallen to about 1 and a half per cent of GDP. Politicians haven't really heeded Dr. MacKinnon's warnings and kept up with spending on research and development or developing students and moving them through the system. Alberta really lags behind the rest of the country when it comes to spending on research and development, when it comes to high school graduating rates and participation in advanced education, in particular at the master's and PhD levels.

I notice that there was a report produced by the institute of Quebec that provided some statistics from 2015, and that was the most recent set of statistics that I could find, Mr. Chair. In that report Alberta placed third last in Canada in terms of high school completion rates. On average, 75 per cent of students in Alberta high schools complete a high school diploma within five years of starting, which, you know, is well below the Canadian average and is certainly lagging behind most of the country.

Of course, we know that that has a knock-on effect. We know that if we don't graduate sufficient students from high school, we have lower participation rates in postsecondary education, and certainly Alberta lags behind the rest of the country in postsecondary education participation rates. We certainly don't do very well in graduating master's degree and PhD students, who have gone through the Alberta education system and completed that level of education.

Now, Mr. Chair, I'm certain that you're wondering what this has to do with the amendment before us.

**The Acting Chair:** Starting to.

**Mr. Schmidt:** The interesting thing is that Alberta, as I've said, lags behind the rest of the country in developing the educational capacities of our students. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and two-spirit students lag behind Alberta as a whole in terms of their educational attainment. Certainly, all the studies that I could find in researching this topic show that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students have much higher high school dropout rates than the average student. Some of the research that I've seen shows a 10 per cent difference. You know, if the average Alberta graduation rate is 75 per cent, well, for LGBTQ students we could

expect that to be 65 per cent of students who don't complete high school.

I know that educational outcomes are something that are top of mind for the Member for Red Deer-North. In question period time and again, when questioned about issues around the budget and those kinds of things, she has mentioned repeatedly that we spend more money per capita on our education system than any other province in the country, and we're getting educational outcomes that lag behind the rest of the country. Certainly, with respect to graduation rates in high school and participation rates in advanced education and that sort of thing, we can do better when it comes to this.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Now, here we have a completely cost-free way of at least improving the outcomes for graduation rates, at least for one sector of students, the LGBTQ students. If students have access to a GSA upon request and that request is met within two weeks, then a gay-straight alliance will be formed in that school, and LGBTQ students will have a much more inclusive, safe, and caring atmosphere in their school. That will directly lead to more LGBTQ students graduating from high school, Madam Chair. That's something that all of us want. I don't think there's any member of this House who, if asked, would disagree with the need for Alberta to see an improvement in its high school completion rates.

3:00 a.m.

Moreover, Madam Chair, it's completely free. This doesn't require any kind of budget increase in any school board's budget. All they have to do is adopt this amendment, impose a two-week timeline upon the formation of a GSA when they're requested by the students, and then that GSA is formed, and we will see an uptick in the completion rates for LGBTQ students in the province of Alberta.

I certainly hope that, you know, the Member for Red Deer-North and her caucus colleagues give strong consideration to what kind of education system we want in the future and whether or not we want to improve high school completion rates, improve participation rates in advanced education, and pass this amendment in the hopes of improving the outcomes that we see in the education system.

Like I said, you know, it's been quite clearly expressed by members opposite that the fall budget is going to be a tough one, so we need to look. We need to be creative about ways that we can improve outcomes without spending additional money. This right here is a great way that we can improve educational outcomes for a subsection of students that will cost the treasury precisely zero dollars, so I don't understand why the members opposite wouldn't jump at this chance to improve educational outcomes and drive our economy forward, because when more students graduate from high school, they're more likely to go on to pursue advanced education. Then they're even more likely to go on and get those PhDs and work in that research and development field and create the innovations that will lead Alberta's economy into the future.

It seems to me that this is a pretty quick and painless way to improve the educational system and lead to economic development and improve economic diversification down the road for Alberta, so I certainly hope that the members opposite take these things into consideration when considering whether or not they will vote for or against this amendment and really take the opportunity to, I think, you know, improve the educational system and improve the outcomes that I know they're keen to improve.

With that, Madam Chair, I will bring an end to my comments and give some time to the hon. members opposite to reflect on this. If

they disagree with my analysis of how to improve the system, I would certainly love for a member opposite to stand up and tell me where I'm wrong and what ideas they have to improve education outcomes and graduation rates for our LGBTQ students because, clearly, there is a problem. All of the research indicates that negative school atmospheres cause higher dropout rates for LGBTQ students.

Like I said, Madam Chair, if not this, then what? What other proposals do they have to make sure that our LGBTQ students complete high school at rates similar to their straight peers? I'm looking forward to a response from members opposite on that and how they see improving educational outcomes for that group of students.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 13 and report progress on Bill 8.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion that the committee rise and report carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:05 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For:

|          |              |            |
|----------|--------------|------------|
| Allard   | Kenney       | Sawhney    |
| Copping  | LaGrange     | Schulz     |
| Ellis    | Loewen       | Schweitzer |
| Fir      | Long         | Shandro    |
| Glubish  | McIver       | Toews      |
| Gotfried | Nally        | Turton     |
| Guthrie  | Nicolaides   | Williams   |
| Hanson   | Nixon, Jason | Wilson     |
| Issik    | Pon          | Yaseen     |
| Jones    | Reid         |            |

Against:

|        |          |         |
|--------|----------|---------|
| Bilous | Nielsen  | Renaud  |
| Dang   | Pancholi | Schmidt |

|         |          |             |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 29 | Against – 6 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Motion that the committee rise and report carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

3:10 a.m.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 13. 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 day 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 voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:11 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For:

|          |              |            |
|----------|--------------|------------|
| Allard   | Kenney       | Reid       |
| Copping  | LaGrange     | Sawhney    |
| Ellis    | Long         | Schulz     |
| Fir      | McIver       | Schweitzer |
| Glubish  | Nally        | Shandro    |
| Gotfried | Neudorf      | Toews      |
| Guthrie  | Nicolaides   | Turton     |
| Hanson   | Nixon, Jason | Williams   |
| Issik    | Pitt         | Wilson     |
| Jones    | Pon          | Yaseen     |

Against:

|        |          |         |
|--------|----------|---------|
| Bilous | Nielsen  | Renaud  |
| Dang   | Pancholi | Schmidt |

Totals: For – 30 Against – 6

[Motion for concurrence carried]

### Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

#### Bill 2 An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business (continued)

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we are on third reading of Bill 2. Is there anyone wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to see you in this Chamber tonight and to be able to debate Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, or, really, as it should be called, the pick-your-pockets bill. We've debated this bill at quite a bit of length in this Assembly. We've discussed it at quite a bit of length, and the members of the opposition have spoken about why this bill is so bad for ordinary Albertans, why it attacks the hard-working families that work throughout our province, why after only a few short weeks in this Assembly this government has already decided to go in and attack holiday pay, attack overtime pay, and really it's to pay for their big tax break to corporations.

That is something that is very, very appalling to members of the opposition. It's something that the members of the opposition are very concerned about. We really think that we need to take a further look and slow down this legislation and not pass it at this time. That's why I will be encouraging my colleagues in the opposition here to vote against this bill. I think that it's something that we need to look at and realize, that for some people in this province it's going to be worth over \$2,500 if they don't receive the overtime pay, if this government is allowed to cut their overtime pay in such an aggressive manner.

Mr. Speaker, I think that I was just hearing from some Albertans last weekend over the holidays how they were just realizing that at the next holiday this government will actually be taking away their time; they'll be taking away their holiday pay; they'll be cancelling their very own Christmas. That's something, I think, many Albertans

are now recognizing, that this government is working for wealthy donors and sponsors and their friends and not the interests of everyday, ordinary Albertans. They're not working for the ordinary oil and gas worker. They're not working for the ordinary trades worker. They're not working for the average person, who understands how important it is to get the time or the pay in lieu on a holiday.

**3:30 a.m.**

We also understand now that the government does not care about young people. Young or old, you deserve equal pay in this province, and we can see that the government is moving aggressively to roll back the minimum wage, which demonstrates not only a lack of compassion but a lack of respect for young workers. Really, we know that this is a lack of respect for the value of the work that young people put in. Here in the opposition we know that for young people their work and the effort and the skill should determine what you make, not what year you were born, not whether you were born in December or January. That shouldn't determine whether you make \$13 or \$15.

That's something, Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned about myself because this actually incentivizes young teenagers who perhaps are a supplemental income for their family or in some cases the primary income in their family, and in fact it actually encourages those young teenagers to drop out of school to try and earn a higher wage. That's something I'm very concerned about, that I think the Minister of Education should be very concerned about, that I think the members opposite should be very concerned about because we should be trying everything we can to ensure these young people have the best possible education for their futures, to be able to have the strongest possible education.

What the youth differential wage does is that it takes the toonies out of the pockets of those young people, it attacks those young people, and it determines that those young people are not worth as much unless, Mr. Speaker – there is a but – those young people were to drop out of school and not become better educated and not work to improve their futures. Then they are worth that extra toonie. They can have that toonie back. That's something I think is absolutely outrageous. I think it's something that all members of this opposition will be happy to vote against, and I hope that members of the government will also see how ludicrous it is, the lunacy that is involved, taking toonies away from these young people. It's something that we know is a serious attack on some of our most vulnerable Albertans.

We also know that the government is trying to create not just a different tier for young people, but they're also trying to create a different tier for servers. Mr. Speaker, that's also something that I think is very shocking. We know that whether you work in a restaurant in Vegreville or a nightclub in Edmonton, there shouldn't be a difference in what you make. You should be able to make a living wage. You should be able to afford to feed your family at the end of the day. If you can't rely on an unstable source of income like tips, then how can we guarantee that families are going to be able to feed themselves at the end of the day, that they won't have to stop at a food bank on the way home?

This bill does nothing to address that. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this bill actually makes the situation worse. I think the minister of labour should know that, and if he doesn't know that, then I've just explained it to him. We've tried to explain this many times throughout the course of debate in this Assembly. I hope he understands, or at the very least I hope he cares for these people. I hope he will have some sympathy for the toonies he's taking away from all of these people and for the stability he'll be taking away

from all these people because that is what this bill will do. The minister will be directly going in to take away their rights and their stability.

We know that the government is really just trying to be – well, Mr. Speaker, it's my opinion that the government is trying to be a Grinch with this bill. I mean, we see that in things like this year, where I believe Christmas will fall on a Saturday, and hard-working parents won't get that extra pay to cover the presents – right? – if you're taking away their pay. Let's say that you live in Lloydminster and you live on the Saskatchewan side. You would receive the holiday pay. But if you live on the Alberta side, you wouldn't. That's something that's very shocking. You will actually be setting up divides within one municipality. You'll actually be setting up class differences and segregating classes within one varied municipality. That's something that I think this bill is shameful for, actually, that it's trying to divide ordinary people that are going about their lives and trying to enjoy their Christmas. It's something that I think all members of the Assembly will be enjoying this year.

Instead, when we look at the people that have to live around borders, they're going to see their friends get off better than them because the Conservative government in Saskatchewan didn't attack as hard as the Conservative government here in Alberta did. That's something that is very strange, and it's very unfair, I think, for ordinary working Albertans, because we see that in almost every other province holiday pay is owed to workers regardless of whether it falls on a regular scheduled day off. I mean, that includes our neighbours to the west, British Columbia, our neighbours to the east, Saskatchewan and, even further east, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, Mr. Speaker.

Instead, what we see is this government directly going after the pocketbooks of everyday Albertans, ordinary Albertans, hard-working people that work in this province. The government is going after not just the pocketbooks of people who work overtime, not just the pocketbooks of people who are young workers or who work in the service industry. The government is really going after the pocketbooks of every single Albertan they can find. They're going after general holiday pay. They're going after the youth. They're going after all of these types of organizations, Mr. Speaker. It really simply shows how much disregard this government has for our labour force, for our advanced labour force here in Alberta, and how little the government cares that these people are the ones who work to keep Alberta strong, who are the ones that are working every single day to make sure our services are working together. It's something that I think is absolutely shameful.

It's something that I think is an absolute shame, that it attacks over 400,000 Albertans, right? It attacks so many people across this entire province. It picks the pockets of so many Albertans. It goes directly to people that will live in every single one of our ridings. Whether you live in Medicine Hat, whether you live in Drumheller, whether you live in High Level, High Prairie, Edmonton, or Fort McMurray, Mr. Speaker, it will attack people in every single sector in every single part of our province. Every single member in this Assembly will know somebody in their constituency who will lose their holiday pay, who will lose their Christmas this year.

Every single member in this Assembly will have to face somebody in their constituency and tell them: "I voted to take away your Christmas. I voted to take away your holiday pay and your overtime pay." That's something that I think members will have to take back to their communities. Members here, especially in the government, will have to go back to their communities and their constituencies and tell people that they don't think they deserve that toonie, that they don't think they deserve a living wage, that they don't think people in their constituencies deserve to be able to not

have to stop at a food bank. That's something that I think members will be very concerned about when they go back home.

I mean, when you hear about governments trying to take away holidays and erase Christmas, it really is something else, Mr. Speaker. It's something that is almost beyond the realm of reason. It's almost something that is unbelievable, but unfortunately, as much as I would like to send it off to fairyland, here we are, and in fact Tinker Bell is not here and we cannot clap for the magic. Instead, what will happen when this bill is passed is that we will absolutely see Christmas disappear. We will absolutely see people under direct attack in that their livelihoods will be affected, their families will be affected.

Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you that never before have I seen people this worked up about this bill. I was actually in my community all day on Canada Day, as I'm sure many members of this Assembly were, and I had multiple people come up to me. Actually, lots and lots of people came up to me, and they said: thank you for standing up for my rights. They said: "Member," – they'd say my name, but I can't say that here, obviously – "thank you for standing up for my rights. Can you please tell the Conservatives that we want them to know that we're proud you're fighting for us?" That's something that I actually heard over and over again. I'll be really honest; I hear it more now in opposition than I ever did in government. I certainly hear people coming up to me and telling me how important the work we're doing is and how important it is that we stand up for their rights more than I ever heard in government because now they see that this Conservative government, the Premier and his government, are attacking ordinary Albertans, are coming after their pay.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order has been called.

#### **Point of Order Language Creating Disorder**

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). You have been clear in this Chamber many times, Mr. Speaker. It's one thing for the opposition or any member of this Assembly to refer to the government as attacking somebody, but to directly say that an hon. member of this place is attacking somebody – the hon. member just said that the Premier was attacking somebody – clearly that is language that would create disorder inside this Chamber, something you've been very clear on. The hon. member should stand up and apologize and withdraw his comments, and he should be ashamed that he continues to speak this way inside this Assembly.

*3:40 a.m.*

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I will not take lessons from the Government House Leader on what is parliamentary or unparliamentary in this place. What I will say is that I personally didn't hear the member say: a member of government. But what I will say is that if he did say that a member and not the government is attacking workers, then on his behalf I will apologize and withdraw that comment.

**The Speaker:** I appreciate the apology. However, given the presence of the member, it would be very, very, very reasonable for him to apologize and withdraw his comments on his own.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will withdraw that comment.

**The Speaker:** I appreciate the apology. I'll consider the point of order concluded.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I meant that the government, which is appointed by the Premier, is the one that is attacking Albertans here. You know very well that the government is appointed by the leader of the government caucus. That was the intention I was trying to make, that this government is attacking ordinary Albertans. It's attacking workers. This government has a disregard for these workers and a real disregard for the effects it will have on families when it comes time for Christmas and when it comes time for their holidays. This is something that I think is very important that the government understand and that the government listen to, not just stand here and perhaps lie with their mouths open but, instead, that they would actually come and speak to why they think it is fair that families shouldn't be able to afford the gifts for their children at the end of the year.

That's something that I think is very important for us to address here, because we're talking about over 400,000 Albertans that now may have to go to a food bank, over 400,000 Albertans that could have over \$2,500 taken away from them, Mr. Speaker. That's not an insignificant number. That's a large number of Albertans that this government knows will be adversely affected by this legislation. It's a large number of Albertans that deserve to have stability in their workplace. Instead of stability, this government is coming in and deciding to tear apart everything that they've been basing their budgets on, and that's something that I don't think is responsible of this government. I don't think this government is being fair to Albertans when they do this, and I think Albertans deserve better than this when their government moves like this.

Really, picking the pockets of ordinary Albertans is nothing that Albertans ever expect their government to do. They would never expect their government to reach into the pockets of young people and take \$2 away. They would never expect their government to reach into the pockets of regular working Albertans and take over \$2,500 away. They would never expect the government to reach into the pockets during the holiday season and take away the presents for their children. That's something that Albertans would never expect their government to do, but right here in black and white, Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 purports to do all of those things. It goes in; it directly attacks the young people. It goes in; it directly attacks overtime pay. It goes in; it directly attacks servers and directly attacks all of these types of fields, just like holidays.

That's something that I think the government should be very concerned about and that the government should have had second thoughts about during committee. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there were some very reasonable amendments which were not accepted. Unfortunately, the government decided not to accept an amendment that would have saved Christmas. I mean, we tried. We really did try. Sometimes you have to look at a bad bill and have to try and spray some Febreze at it, but it doesn't always work.

Mr. Speaker, this bill continues to be a bad bill, and it continues to attack and go after the pockets of ordinary Albertans. It picks the pockets of ordinary working people, and that's something that I think is an absolute shame. It's a shame that we have to stand here and defend ordinary Albertans while the government, that purports to be about jobs, decides that those jobs can be worth more or less at the will of the government. That's something that I think all hon. members should vote against here in this Assembly and that I encourage all hon. members to vote against or at least get up and explain to us why they decided that Christmas wasn't as important for these hard-working Albertans.

With that, I think it's something that we need to make sure we continue to debate in this House and that we debate this in the fulsome. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise under 29(2)(a) and address the remarks that were just made on An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the previous speaker realizes that when he's speaking against this bill, he's actually speaking against the best interest of the vast majority of businesses in Alberta that have asked for the changes that are in this bill. I wonder if he realizes that, rather than, as he says, taking away benefits from people, he's going to allow people to actually have overtime. I wonder if he realizes or has ever taken a second to actually talk to any Albertan that has not gotten overtime since the NDP changed these rules, where perhaps they did get overtime before and now the business is forced to either not give the overtime, sometimes turning away business, or hire another worker at regular time rather than giving the extended hours to the workers they already have.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member that was just speaking has thought about Alberta families who could use that extra income, that actually might be able to trade that income on a one-to-one basis so that they could actually have some extra days off around Christmas, which they will not get now because the employer can't give them a day and a half. I wonder if the hon. member has thought about whether what he's actually proposing is to take away an extended holiday, an extended Christmas for a lot of Albertans with the way he talks about this bill without understanding the ramifications of what he's saying, without actually understanding how it's taking away the livelihoods of a lot of Albertans now that would otherwise be offered.

I wonder if he's thought about the Premier's suggestion in question period the one day that if somebody worked 40 hours of overtime, they would get under the new rules a week off. Instead of a week off, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and the Leader of the Opposition should have realized that that worker will probably not get any time off because they won't be able to be offered any overtime to have more time to spend with their family, to have more time to extend their holidays and to do those things.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member has thought about the \$13 an hour that tens of thousands of particularly young Albertans aren't getting now, because, well, \$15 an hour if you're working is surely better than \$13, \$13 is surely better than zero, and zero is the number that tens of thousands of Albertans are getting now under the rules that the NDP put in place. I wonder if the hon. member has thought about how much damage the NDP policies have done to Alberta and how those policies that this bill is correcting have contributed to the 180,000-plus Albertans that are now out of work, up to 180,000 families. It could be fewer families because some families actually might be missing two paycheques right now, Mr. Speaker. That's the extent of the damage that the NDP policies have wrought upon the honest, hard-working people of Alberta and that this bill is designed to correct and will correct.

I wonder if the hon. member has thought about how, under the regulations before the NDP messed them up, there used to be low unemployment in Alberta, how just about everybody that wanted to be working was, Mr. Speaker. These are all good things that used to be true in Alberta before the NDP policies contributed to making Alberta a much less pleasant place to work, a much less profitable place to work, and by extension a much, much less family-friendly place to work, because when you take away those paycheques,

when you take away the banked overtime, when you take away the first jobs that people get, the first rung on the economic ladder, many Albertans can't get to the second rung on the economic ladder till they get onto the first rung, that first minimum wage job where they build up their skills, where they build up their reputation, and where they work their way up to a higher paying, more responsible job.

I wonder if the hon. member has thought about just how much damage the NDP policies have done over the last four years and how badly the corrections in Bill 2 are needed in order to correct the mess that the NDP has left in their wake.

3:50 a.m.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert has the call.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. I suppose that's a good place to start. I believe that we had an amendment about changing the title of the bill that didn't go over well, but, you know, it's funny that "open for business" means subsidies and tax cuts on the backs of workers. It doesn't really make sense. Wage cuts for workers, tax cuts for the wealthy and powerful and lobbyists: okay, well, let's talk about that.

The member just stood up and gave a mini lecture about why people whose wages are going to be cut \$2 should be thankful because it's better than zero. Okay. Okay. Well, it's clear how you feel about that. What I believe: I believe in equal pay for equal work. I'm glad they find this funny. I believe in equal pay for equal work. That means equal pay for young people, for youth. If they're doing the job of someone that is older than them, they deserve equal pay. I believe in equal pay for women. I believe in equal pay for employees that have disabilities. I believe in equal pay.

You know, Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago, I think, you told us late one night that our incredible pages were not going to have their wages reduced if they were under 18. That was really great news. I'm really happy for the pages, actually, because they deserve it. They work hard. They're incredible young people. But then, you know, why is that okay for our people here, but it's not okay for other folks? Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't have done that. I'm very grateful that we did, and I wish that we could extend that to every other young person. But why is it okay for the people that we have to look at when we're here every day? They're different. Okay, if that's the way you want to play.

First of all, people under 18 will get a \$2 pay cut, \$2 an hour, to \$13. Now, I don't know. The members opposite seem to think that that's more than enough, and young people should be happy with that; they could be getting zero. But here's the thing about youth, one of the things that's even more offensive about this youth minimum wage. During breaks and summer holidays the youth rate will apply to all hours worked. This is particularly insulting, I believe, to young people. Maybe it's not your life experience; it's certainly my life experience that in the summertime that was the time that we weren't in school. That was the time that we were working full-time, often a couple of different jobs so that we could save enough money to do what we needed to do in the new year or to start saving for school, saving for all kinds of things, and for the most part they aren't luxuries. Often it was saving for school. Cut youth wages in the summer, and students have an even harder time to save for school.

It's particularly interesting to think about rural students. The cost of postsecondary education in Alberta, in Canada, is fairly expensive. I think that if you calculate the cost, you include tuition, books, and, for people that are coming into urban centres – perhaps

they don't have postsecondary in their communities or close by – moving to Edmonton, moving to Calgary, moving to Red Deer, moving to Lethbridge, they have to save quite a bit more to be able to do that because very often they have to live in residence, they have to rent a place, there's a lot more driving. There are a lot of expenses because, you know, maybe they can't live at home with their folks and have their folks help them out. In effect, we're making it a little bit tougher for students to save for school.

What's the alternative? Kids or youth are delaying going to school, they're not going to school at all, or they're taking out loans, and those are some pretty big loans. Here are some stats. These ranges were a little bit old when I did this research, but here are some average costs, and these are costs that are inclusive of tuition, books, and, in some cases, housing. To take two semesters in a college the range was between \$9,750 and \$26,500. Now, I imagine that there are some housing costs in there that are towards the higher end. A technical school can range from \$11,000 to \$18,750, and university, of course quite a bit higher, is \$11,780 to just over \$45,000. That's a lot of money, and that's a lot of savings. That's a lot of years. I imagine that high school students that know that their families don't have the capacity to pay for their postsecondary education start saving early on. They're going to have to work a little bit harder to save for postsecondary, especially rural students, who have actually quite a bit more to save. They don't have the luxury of living close by. Right away we're putting some roadblocks in front of them.

I think that it's interesting that when we were talking about Bill 8, one of my colleagues was taking a different route to talk about why we were supporting the amendment. Amendment A5 I think it was. He talked about jobs and the economy and why it was important to do everything that we could to support these vulnerable youth so that they would be encouraged to go to postsecondary. The same applies here. We want our kids to be educated. We want our youth to go on to postsecondary. We want them to do all of the things that we need them to do. They are the future. But here we are cutting their wage, making it a little tougher. Now, thankfully there are banks, of course, credit cards. They could borrow money, and then they end up paying it back. I think we all know what that's like. On average, stats from 2016-17 indicate that it takes approximately nine years for students right now to pay back their debt. That's a concern.

Obviously, I have some other concerns around overtime and holiday pay, and I wanted to shine a light again on another sector that maybe doesn't get talked about all too often. We talked about construction, oil and gas, what the change in overtime would mean for them. I listened to the debate. I can't remember which day it was now. I think more than a day ago. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View was talking about overtime agreements and how they are supposed to be voluntary agreements. Certainly, on the surface they are voluntary agreements, but I think that when you have an inherent power differential in an employment situation, you have an employer and employee, you know, there are some questions about the voluntary nature of an overtime agreement.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the Alberta disability workers. They actually have an umbrella organization in Alberta, and it's, oddly enough, called the Alberta Disability Workers. There are about 10,000 disability workers in Alberta. They are actually a highly skilled workforce. They're not paid a whole lot, but they're a highly skilled workforce. These are people that support folks with disabilities in a number of different settings. Sometimes they are contracted to work with families to support people in their home, particularly when they're young. FSCD is that funding program that supports families to start some really important intervention with their children that have disabilities. There are disability workers

that support adults. Those are often funded through PDD. Then there are service providers that help manage that work. They support people with disabilities so they can live in their community. Somebody with a disability might only need an hour a week just to check in. “How’s your budget? How’s the banking going? Let’s get a grocery list going. Let’s book some trips with DATS if that’s the case. How was work?” Community living. They might support someone in supported employment. That might be someone with a fairly profound disability that requires staff with them all the time that they’re at the work site so that they’re able to do the work. They also support people in terms of job coaching. Sometimes there are people that are fairly skilled. Maybe they’re just changing jobs, doing something different, so job coaches will actually help update resumés, help get them to interviews, learn bus routes if they must, learn the culture of their new workplace – maybe they have to punch in; maybe there’s a certain place to store their lunch – then learn the job. Sometimes it’s just rote learning at first. Then they learn the job, and off they go. These are disability workers that do this work.

Now, the reason why I’m boring you with all of this detail is that it’s important. These people are not paid very much, and they work long hours. They work shift work, actually, a lot of them, as you can imagine. People’s lives don’t go 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, so these folks are tasked with supporting people during the holidays, the summer, Christmas. They work night shifts. They do all kinds of shifts, and they are not paid very much. So to remove some really basic benefits, like possibly getting a paid vacation day that’s not your normal workday, is outrageous, and that you would call the bill that does that Open for Business: open for business on whose back? This is a group of people that works really hard, that we rely on to do some really, really important work in this province.

**4:00 a.m.**

I think you’ll find out, as you start to consult and as you start to hear from your constituents, that this particular community struggles a great deal with staffing, ongoing staff training as a result of really, really high turnover rates. I can remember back in, like, the early 2000s – maybe 2002, 2003, 2004 – one of the . . . [interjection] Sorry. It’s a little distracting when they’re mumbling. One of the things that they had us do at the place that I worked is that we had to calculate stats on turnover rates. Other organizations did as well. It was just to take the temperature to see how bad it was, and in one year I believe it was an over 65 per cent turnover rate in this particular sector.

Now, if you look at that, it tells you a lot of things. There are turnover rates that are that high for a number of reasons. People don’t just do the work for money. I think there are other reasons people do the work. They do the work for the satisfaction of the work they do, passion for what they believe in. Sometimes it’s the little extras, maybe seeing people succeed, but it’s also, you know, vacation. Maybe there are some other benefits that are involved in your job. But those turnover rates were so high, and what that does to this particular sector is that it requires constant retraining. In this particular group it has some pretty intensive training to be able to support people correctly in the community. So you are reducing the benefits to a group that is already not paid very much, and you’re still requiring all these skills.

Let me tell you that some of the training for a community disability worker to be able to support somebody properly – and these are not just things I’m making up. There are accreditation standards that require this training. There’s training around medication administration because you are responsible not only to do the electronic tracking of the medication, to receive the medication, record it, and all of that but to understand what happens when something goes wrong, to understand what a PRN is, to have

medication perhaps on-site that isn’t a normal dose but sometimes you need it, first aid, CPR – I’m sure everybody knows that and has done that – abuse prevention and reporting. This is really intensive training that is required for these workers. This is something that this particular sector really struggles with, restrictive procedures. People that don’t work in this sector don’t understand what that is.

Again, this is a group that is required to work their normal shifts – these are long hours – and then they’re required to constantly do this training and update and then recertify. Yet we’re going to look at this particular group and go, “Well, you know, you have an arrangement with your employer about overtime; see how that goes,” and “Well, yeah; you might not qualify for that holiday day” when, in fact, these are workers that actually rely on a day off with pay.

Some of the other training that’s really intense that requires a lot of skill: nonviolent crisis intervention, mental health first aid. All of these things are required training for this particular group of employees, and this is a group, again, that isn’t paid very much, but they’re responsible for human beings every single day. They’re responsible for aspects of their lives that are not normal in other jobs.

Let’s pick another industry. Let’s just pick construction. There’s a lot to do around injury prevention, safety awareness training for that particular sector. But it’s different from this sector because workers in this particular sector have the lives of the people that they’re supporting in their hands every single day, whether they’re driving them, whether they’re giving them their medication, whether they’re responding, let’s say, to a seizure.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Wow. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me. I was of course listening intently to the Member for St. Albert, especially with her extensive background in working with people with disabilities and challenges in the workplace to try to make sure they have gainful employment. I know that her experience takes her a lot farther than just her constituents in St. Albert. As she was explaining some of those challenges, I know she was wrapping up some of her comments. I was hoping she was going to do that, but I was also wondering if she might be able to enlighten us about maybe some of the people that have reached out to her from other corners of the province with some of the concerns that Bill 2 poses and how that can affect their lifestyle and their ability to be able to find meaningful employment.

**The Speaker:** The Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. Certainly, people have expressed concerns about this. I think that when you sit in a place like this and you do a job that has the flexibility, maybe, that ours has to be able to take a day off when you need it and be reimbursed at the rate that we are reimbursed at, it’s easy to say: “Well, you know, it’s just a day. It’s just overtime. It’s fine. It’s just \$2 for youth.” I think our perspective is a little bit off because \$2 an hour for somebody, a youth, or overtime being paid out at a different rate than you earned it – and keep in mind that time was taken away from other things. Those things are actually important. Those things have the ability to change what you’re able to do in a day, particularly if you are supporting a family, not just yourself.

Sort of going back to this particular sector that I do know a fair amount about because I worked front line a very long time ago, I also supported a lot of staff, and what I know is that because of the wage that they were paid – and, you know, we certainly paid them as much as we could, but because of the earnings and the high cost

of housing and food and transportation and all of those things, very often employees would have two jobs, more than one job. That was the norm. So to take away the little extras when people are already really struggling . . . [interjections] I don't really know what's so funny about that, but okay. To take away those important things is not good.

I want to go back to the title of this bill. I get that you're trying to capitalize on the image of the little open-for-business sign. I get that. It's branding or whatever you want to call it. But to say that you're open for business based on implementing cuts and changes that came directly from a lobby group right before the election and to do it on the backs of people that don't have a voice – these are young people; they can't even vote yet – and people that are busy sometimes working one and two jobs, to take away things like a guarantee that if they do the overtime, they will be paid a little bit more or if they work and it's not their normal workday, they'll get a day off with pay, you know, is pretty rich.

I think, getting into the weeds – and we've heard again and again about the training wage and why it's not a good idea, never mind for payroll, data entry, and all of the work that you have to do for payroll – when you start to have different rates of pay, different earning levels, it's a lot of work. You talk about wanting to cut red tape, and then you create more. I don't really understand that part.

But when you start to get into training wages, here's where it gets a little dangerous. People that have been marginalized, or maybe they've been called people with modest levels of human capital: these are the people that have been traditionally given training wages because they're seen as less than. I believe in equal pay for equal work, and sadly it has been people with disabilities, people that have been marginalized because of their disability that have typically been given training wages because they're just not ready for real life, they're just not ready for full wages.

When we start talking about training wages, we're talking about people being worth less. If you've got somebody who's 17, somebody who's 19 doing the same job – you've arbitrarily decided they're worth less because of when they were born. I don't get that. That's not how you create a stronger society and a stronger economy, by cutting people that don't have a voice yet. That is not how you do it. There is a different path forward than this.

4:10 a.m.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 2? The hon. the Premier.

**Mr. Kenney:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker and to those who serve us in this Assembly: pages, table officers, security, and others, *Hansard*. I'd like to thank all of them on behalf of the government and, I'm sure, all members for their remarkable devotion.

I'd like in particular to commend members of the government caucus for their determination and discipline to keep their trust with Alberta voters. It was only 10 weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta voters spoke in the largest numbers in the history of Alberta to send a large majority government to this place with the most detailed and robust electoral mandate ever obtained by an incoming government, a positive plan to renew Alberta as a place that is strong and free, which delineated some 375 specific and detailed commitments to Albertans. Tonight we are here to ensure that we keep those commitments. This is about honouring our trust with Albertans.

Part of that trust is our central commitment to get Alberta back to work and to undo the massive economic damage inflicted on Albertans by the previous NDP government. In the speech that we just heard, in the NDP's opposition to Bill 2, in their efforts to obstruct the implementation of our democratically endorsed mandate, what we see is a party that is embittered, a party incapable

of acknowledging the damage it inflicted, a party unwilling to acknowledge the message that was sent to it by the majority of Albertans just weeks ago, who endorsed the platform which included, as Bill 2, the open for business act, the provisions which are before us at third reading at this moment.

Mr. Speaker, it's remarkable that the hon. the Leader of the Opposition was recently asked by an Ottawa journalist what mistakes her government might have made which led to its historic repudiation as the first one-term government in the history of Alberta, and she was unable to identify a single failing of her government. Talk about a catastrophic lack of humility. Talk about hubris. Well, pride cometh before the fall. When I mentioned this in a speech last week, the hon. the Leader of the Opposition stood up and said: no, Mr. Speaker; I've identified something that went wrong; the voters didn't agree with the carbon tax. That's what the NDP is doing. They're blaming Albertans for not understanding why they introduced job-killing policies.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the reason why I have the honour to stand here, the responsibility to stand here as Premier, the reason why members of the United Conservative caucus are here at 4:15 in the morning, after having sat for well over 30 hours in this place, is precisely because we were elected to come here to undo the damage imposed by a devastating economic experiment imposed on this province by an NDP government that came to office at a time when there were already deep challenges because of the reduction in commodity prices in late 2014. They were elected not before the collapse in commodity prices; they were elected approximately nine months after that began. And seeing that situation unfold, seeing the province dive into a deep recession, what did they decide to do? In policy after policy they decided to drag us deeper into recession, deeper and deeper, worsening a bad situation. That constellation of antigrowth policies had a very real human impact on people's lives.

Mr. Speaker, as they raised taxes on everything, they raised the highest personal tax rate by 50 per cent in the middle of a recession. Then they raised taxes on job creators, what they call big, evil corporations, the folks that actually put everything on the line, the small and medium-sized business people who mortgaged their homes to start the small business, who work 100-hour weeks, who have no minimum wage, no guaranteed benefits, no job security, no defined benefit pensions, no union to defend them, those people, the true unsung heroes of our economy. What did they do? They raised taxes on employers by 20 per cent in the middle of a recession.

Then they imposed the single-largest tax increase in Alberta history, one that they hid from voters in the previous election, the carbon tax, that made everything more expensive, made it more expensive for seniors to heat their homes and single moms to buy groceries and working guys to fill up their gas tank to get to work, made it more expensive for nonprofits and charities and small businesses and school boards and everybody to do darn near everything. Then they raised the provincial share of property taxes. Then they made a deal with their friend and ally Mr. Trudeau to raise payroll taxes. Imagine that. You're in the middle of a recession. Jobs are being shed by the tens of thousands, and what do you do as a government? You make it more expensive to hire people. NDP economics, Mr. Speaker.

Then came massive new regulations on everything that moved, including the job-killing regulations which we are repealing in An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, Bill 2. Mr. Speaker, I recently met a small-business person who runs a café in Inglewood in Calgary, who told me that the mandate imposed by the previous NDP government, which we seek here to undo, to pay for statutory holiday pay for days that they weren't even open as a business, days

when the workers were never working, constituted a 13th month of payroll for him. What did it mean? He had to lay people off.

Ten days ago in Calgary I met a furniture store owner, another one of the terrible businesspeople that the NDP thrives on demonizing in their politics of division and class warfare. They love demonizing people, Mr. Speaker. It's just about all they know how to do. After Conservatives come business owners, the people who have the temerity to take risks, to work hard to create jobs and opportunity. Well, I was speaking to one of them, one of those terrible business owners, who employs dozens of people and has barely made it through this NDP recession, who had to lay a whole bunch of them off. He and his wife have to work seven days a week to keep that furniture store going. You know what he told me? An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business will immediately, by the change in the overtime provision, save his business \$45,000. He said: "You know what we're going to do with that? We're going to hire a new staff so maybe my wife and I can take a part day off."

Now, I know that one job doesn't make much difference to the NDP. They don't really care, you know. I don't know how many of them run a business and understand the sacrifices those folks make, Mr. Speaker, while they stand up here and defend interest groups that are formal legal affiliates of the NDP suing Alberta taxpayers. But why are we doing this? Why did we make this commitment? Why did Albertans endorse that commitment in the recent election? They did so because of the human cost of the NDP's disastrous economic experiment. They sent us here because we've gone through four years of economic decline and stagnation, because our gross domestic product, the size of our economy, is 4 per cent lower than it was four years ago, because the average after-tax family income is down by 6 per cent.

**4:20 a.m.**

Now, Mr. Speaker, given that that didn't really happen in the public sector, imagine how much more that average after-tax income is down for people in the private sector. How about those small-business owners, a whole lot more than 6 per cent? Unemployment pushing 200,000 people: unprecedented in our economic history. Albertans laughed them out of office when they tried to tell people that happy times were here again as we saw unemployment go up in seven of the last nine months of the NDP's economic experiment. That does not account for the tens of thousands of people who gave up looking for work altogether, who left the labour market. For 36 months of the NDP's economic disaster net interprovincial out-migration from Alberta for the first time in our modern history: for three years more Canadians left Alberta than came to it. They took the land of opportunity and turned it into a brain drain.

I know that every member, certainly of the government side here, knows a constituent or somebody – I look at my friend from Fort McMurray, who has a constituent who he tells me about often who has gone to Iraq. I met somebody in Mundare recently, a mom with her three beautiful young boys, who broke down in tears telling me about how her husband had to leave the oil field in central Alberta to go to work in communist Cuba. We all know people like that. The stats don't pick them all up. What about the underemployment, those who are still technically employed under the NDP but whose incomes were reduced radically, whose families had to massively reduce their budgets?

That's why we were sent here, Mr. Speaker, with a bold agenda to turn that around, and I just cannot understand. I've been on the winning and losing side of elections before. I've got a little bit of experience in this, and I must tell you that I have never seen a party losing an election so convincingly so obviously refuse to come to terms with that. Here they are filibustering not just some bill that

the government's dreamt up, not some minor platform commitment to which we vaguely alluded, but the bill that was presented as Bill 2 and presented in stark detail to Albertans. This bill has the imprimatur, the approval, the democratic endorsement of the people of Alberta. The NDP is seeking to stop it because they are desperate to preserve their failed economic experiment, but with the determination of this caucus and the support of Albertans we will not let them continue to drag our economy down.

By the way, the last member who spoke over there just talked a lot about equal pay. There's a lot of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, making equal pay at zero dollars right now, about 180,000 Albertans. It reminds me of what Margaret Thatcher always said about the left. They're happy if everybody is equally poor. Well, we are not; that's not the Alberta ethic. That's why they were so convincingly repudiated by voters 10 weeks ago. Don't they understand? They drove a crisis in youth unemployment in a province that always had the highest labour force participation. I know that sounds like a wonky phrase. Let me spell it out. It basically means that you take the total number of people in a particular share of the population, let's say 15- to 25-year-olds. In this province that used to be 72 per cent labour force participation, by an order of magnitude the highest in Canada, and that was a great thing. It meant that those young people, those teenagers, those early-20-somethings, were getting that first job or that second job, that critical experience that, the economic data tell, sets people up for success for the rest of their lives. That was part of the secret sauce of the Alberta advantage, that high level of labour force participation, of employment, of work ethic amongst young people, and in the best years many of those young people were making very good money. All of that ended under the NDP. [interjection]

They're laughing about it, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you that Albertans laughed them right out of office when they saw what happened, when they drove us up to the highest level of youth unemployment in the history of the province of Alberta, and we saw a catastrophic decline in the number of young people even bothering to seek a job under the NDP's economic disaster. The labour force participation for youth fell from 72 per cent to 61 per cent, and even amongst that 61 per cent we were as high at one point as 16 per cent youth unemployment, 35,000 young people looking for work. Sure, those 35,000 had equal pay at zero dollars an hour. The youth job creation wage is about moving those young people from unemployment and having left the labour market to employment, from zero dollars an hour to at least \$13 an hour, which would be higher than the minimum wage in virtually every other province, higher than what adults were making at the minimum wage just two years ago. Everywhere I go, I'm being thanked by young people for what we're doing to bring opportunity back to this economy for them.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes to labour relations – by the way, let me pause to commend the hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration for his tremendous work on this and so many other projects that got our economy back to work.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's cut to the chase here. The real reason the NDP is filibustering this platform commitment, that has the democratic seal of approval, is because they cannot tolerate workplace democracy. They took it away. It used to be and what we returned to is where you have to go to workers in a secret ballot vote before you can put a union on them. Now, we believe in the constitutionally protected right of collective bargaining, but we believe that you should only be forced into a collective bargaining unit, Mr. Speaker, if there has been a majority secret ballot vote. But that doesn't work for some of the special-interest bosses who are formal legal affiliates of the NDP. They want to be able to force

people into unions even against their democratic wishes, which is why they brought in a system called automatic carding.

What does that mean, Mr. Speaker? Well, it means that an organizer can stand in the parking lot and say: sign the card. If you don't sign the card, what's the implication? Well, I can tell you what it was on one construction site in Calgary. Some vulnerable new Canadian workers with limited English language skills were told that they were going to be fined thousands of dollars by the union and potentially face deportation from the country if they didn't sign the card. They signed the cards, and then they found themselves stuck in a union they never supported. And guess what? They went to the Labour Relations Board and said: we want out; we never agreed to this. They said: I'm sorry; that's the law.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that we will overcome the obstruction of the NDP, which in its pridefulness refuses to acknowledge the democratic mandate to adopt An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business. Through the passage of this bill, we will restore workplace democracy and a secret ballot vote for all workers in Alberta. That's really what it's all about. They get the phone calls from their special-interest bosses, who say: you can't let the Conservatives bring this. It doesn't matter that over a million Albertans voted for this. It doesn't matter that it tramples on democratic rights. All this is about is preserving a system that allows people to be bullied and intimidated into doing what their special-interest friends want. You know, they can stand here, defend their powerful special-interest friends that have a formal, legal affiliation, who ran vicious attack ads against Conservatives, spending millions of dollars of forced union dues. They can do their payback for those folks here now, but I'll tell you what: we are going to stand up for ordinary working women and men in this province to ensure that they never face intimidation when it comes to voting on certification in their workplace.

4:30 a.m.

Then, finally, they're trying to scare people, as they always do – it's always fear and smear, division and demonization – and scaring people that we're taking away overtime. How ridiculous. You know what? They tried the fear and smear in the campaign, and Albertans told them: get out of here; you're done; it's over. Mr. Speaker, Albertans didn't buy it. They didn't buy the fear and smear. Their friends spent millions of dollars on attack ads, and it didn't work. You know why? Because there's just too much common sense in this province. People could see through the fear and the smear. People know that all we propose to do in the open for business act is to empower workers, where they choose to do so, at their volition, with their will, to negotiate more flexible shifts so that they can have an extra day off in the summer or they can have extra hours if they're working and getting good tip income.

You know, the NDP just can't stand this. Their driving impulse is to control people's lives. It's to regulate them. It's to penalize businesses for the temerity of taking risks to create employment. What we seek to do here with this common-sense measure, which had a long-standing practice in Alberta, is to empower workers to negotiate with their employers, because what happened since the NDP brought this in is that people stopped getting those overtime opportunities. Employers said: "I'm sorry. Got to pay you 15 bucks now. We're barely making any money or we're not at all. I'm having to lay people off, and now you're coming to me asking for a certain structure of hours that will force me to pay time and a half. We can't do it." That means the worker doesn't get the time off, and they don't get the overtime. So you've got the NDP's, like, obsession with micromanaging the lives of people and those evil business owners in particular, who can never be trusted.

You know, one of the most – well, there are so many outrageous things that happened under the previous government. Just one that comes to mind was when the former minister of labour, I think, if I'm not mistaken, the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods, was invited to speak to the annual gathering of Restaurants Canada. Now, that is an industry, by the way, that employs I believe over 200,000 Albertans and is the largest employer of young people in this province. The typical restaurant is an owner-operator small business. They invited the minister of labour or anybody, any minister from the NDP cabinet, to come and speak to them. The minister of labour was designated to go, and the day before the conference she issued a statement saying that she had decided she was not going to attend, that she was going to boycott the meeting with the restaurant owners because she said that she realized that they had an ideological, antiworker agenda. Imagine, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to table the news release where she actually said this. Imagine the minister responsible for labour attacking one of the single largest creators of labour in Alberta.

That was the NDP's economic disaster. It wasn't bad enough that they killed tens of thousands of hospitality jobs through the 50 per cent increase in the minimum wage in the middle of a recession, through higher taxes, through lower take-home pay, through the economic crisis that they created, through this kind of red tape. It wasn't enough. But then they literally had to add insult to injury by insulting, you know, these or many of these folks, who literally clean the toilets in their businesses when the lights are being turned off at the end of an 18-hour day. Mr. Speaker, how dare they insult those women and men who do so much to create the first jobs for young Albertans.

We will never insult the job creators of this province, but we will do everything we can to liberate them to create more jobs and more opportunity in this province, and that is why I am proud to stand here at 4:35 in the morning in support of third reading of Bill 2, the open for business act. These are common-sense measures to bring balance back to Alberta labour legislation, to repeal some of the job-killing regulations imposed by the NDP. Everywhere I go, I meet employers – I know my colleagues hear it – who come up to say: "Thank you. Thank you for doing this. We have a new lease on life. We can hire people again. We know we can keep our doors open. There's hope on the horizon."

I'll just close by saying this, Mr. Speaker. We Albertans are natural optimists. That's what drew people to this province from every corner of this country and all around the world, a sense of a place where dreams could be achieved and potential realized through hard work and playing by the rules. That has been the character and culture of this province. We start this morning. I'll be leaving right from this speech to go and help to lead the Calgary Stampede, where we celebrate those frontier values, our rural roots, that work ethic, that sense of self-reliance but also strong communities. Undergirding all of that is a tremendous, deep sense of hopefulness and optimism.

But Albertans, even with their natural optimism, need a rational reason for their optimism. What I hear from Albertans everywhere I go is that this new government has given them that reason for renewed optimism, but we need to put real substance behind it, and that is why we are moving forward with such determination on this bold legislative reform agenda, including Bill 2, the open for business act. Let's stop the delay tactics. Let's stop the filibusters. Let's let Albertans see these changes they voted for put into law to get Alberta back to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen to ask a brief question or comment.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several comments for the Premier. I'd like to clarify some of his comments and pose questions to the hon. Premier. The first point that I'd like to raise is that somehow this Premier and this government think that they got 100 per cent of the votes during the election. They did not. They got about 55 per cent. Is that substantial? Absolutely. But a percentage of Albertans also voted for our opposition, for our party, for our members to be able to rise in this place and speak on behalf of our members and, as well, to hold this government to account. Now, the Premier seems to think that he can do whatever he wants, that somehow the rules of democracy as far as, you know, the opposition doing their job to hold the government to account don't apply because somehow, in his mind and in the government's mind, they really have a monopoly on this province.

You know, I find it interesting that the Premier talks about jobs. I'd love to know from him his comments on the 30,000 jobs that have been lost so far since this government took office through the cancellation of the climate leadership plan, the renewable electricity program, and now attacks on the tech sector and artificial intelligence, by throwing that sector into complete disarray, because the government refuses to fund and ensure that Alberta continues to remain number 3 in the world.

What I find really rich is the fact that the Premier talks about campaigning on this bill. I would love for him to stand up in this place or to tell Albertans through the media when he was asked repeatedly about campaigning to cut the wages of overtime workers. Now, either the government continues to mislead Albertans by saying that they had a mandate in the election for this bill – well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? Albertans, especially construction and oil and gas sector workers, were shocked that this Premier is cutting their overtime pay and did not campaign on that. So that's the first point of clarification that needs to happen. I can tell you that the media asked the Premier, over and over again, afterwards and actually during the campaign if that meant cutting overtime pay, and repeatedly the then leader of the UCP denied that that was going to happen.

**4:40 a.m.**

I'd like to know how cutting youth wages is actually going to work here in Alberta when other provinces have attempted cutting youth wages, which actually has not had the impact that this government claims.

You know, the other thing that's fascinating is that ensuring that workers are eligible for their time and a half is something that exists in every other province in this country, that we did change, and I'm curious to know why the Premier wants to attack the working people of this province.

I also find it completely fascinating that there are incredible, obviously, businesses and business owners in this province who do pay fair wages and treat their workers exceptionally well. Unfortunately, there are some that do not. But, you know, what I find rich is that when we, the opposition, stand up and talk about wanting to ensure that workers are also treated well, somehow we're in the pockets of unions. This government and this Premier speak very poorly of organized labour yet can attack them, and that's okay. But if we pull up an example of a business that has mistreated a worker, well, suddenly then we're attacking all businesses. You can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker.

You know, that was a great little election speech that we listened to there.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to speak to third reading of Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that the last speaker there, the Premier, is a hard act to follow, but at the very least it was entertaining. Let's talk about Bill 2, the Act to Pick People's Pockets and Hopefully Make Alberta Open for Business. You know, I listened to some of the things that the Premier said and even some of the other members over the course of a little bit here in talking about this disaster that they were talking about and how the former NDP government led the province to ruin and everything like that because of our policies.

One of the things I wanted to quickly look at: when we look back at 2018, unfortunately unemployment in the province during that year averaged 6.6 per cent. Coincidentally, a barrel of oil at that time was \$58.15. The last time I looked . . . [interjections] I have the floor here, Mr. Speaker, so maybe I can continue my remarks uninterrupted.

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt. However, I think you'll have found over a period of time that there has been some give-and-take and some heckling here. The Speaker is more than happy to determine who has and who doesn't have the floor.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that very much. When I was looking back, just quickly, as an example, in 2009 and 2010, respectively, oil prices at that time were \$53.48 and \$71.21, and coincidentally the unemployment rate at that time was 6.5 per cent for 2009 and 6.6 per cent for 2010.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I can't help but wonder, Madam Speaker, if it was bad economic policy during that time that created that unemployment rate. As we all know, during 2009 and 2010 the Conservatives were currently governing the province of Alberta, so I just thought I'd throw that out there since it was brought up.

One of the other things I wanted to quickly address, Madam Speaker, is that, again, we heard the hon. Premier talking about the mandate that was received and how many votes they got, that 1.04 million people in Alberta did vote for the UCP. But I also couldn't help but notice that 3.3 million Albertans did not vote for the UCP, talking about spin because we always hear spin from the other side of the floor. You know, a 2 per cent increase in the corporate tax rate turns into 20 per cent, and a raise in the minimum wage turns into 50 per cent, so it's all about spin. I just thought I'd throw my spin in there when we're talking about Bill 2 and how this is going to negatively impact Albertans. It negatively impacts them by affecting their general holiday pay. It affects the way that their overtime can be paid out. It affects changes to the Labour Relations Code. It affects changes to the youth rate. I want to quickly talk about some of those.

I've always told people through my time in the labour movement, even my own members in my workplace before I was an MLA: never ever build your life around overtime because the employer is never on the hook to have to give you overtime. There's no rule anywhere that says that an employer is required to give you overtime when the employee asks; it doesn't happen. Usually overtime occurs when the workload needs to be done. They don't have the staff coming in to do it, so they ask somebody to stay to accomplish that. But that is never a guaranteed right.

But when you do take your time away from your family, your friends, your free time to perform that overtime, you should be compensated appropriately, which is at time and a half, and that should be included when you're just banking your time. I've heard

time and again from members opposite: time is money, time is money, time is money. Well, if time is money, then your time equals up to time and a half when you bank it. The problem I've always seen around this banking of overtime hours is when it comes time to actually use them. Unfortunately, I've seen bad actors out there. There just never seems to be a convenient time to take time off. What ends up resulting, Madam Speaker, is that they end up saying: well, we know we can't give you the time off right now, but if you need the money, we could pay it out to you at straight time. I've seen it over and over again, and you are taking money away from employees that earned it legitimately for performing overtime work that was asked of them at that time.

As you can imagine, the roles that are laid out in here will allow these bad actors to take advantage of that and potentially force the good actors to have to react and respond. They can't compete because a bad actor is doing it wrong. Again, I've seen it just in plain old negotiations, the same company negotiating a contract that has a non-union contract, and the first thing they say is: well, I can't compete with this business over here because they pay less. The same business. This is allowing those kinds of situations to be created, and that's not fair to hard-working Albertans, who, when they do work that overtime to bank it or use it later, should be compensated fairly for that work.

4:50 a.m.

Now, holiday pay. I would be interested to know from any member in this House: previous to being elected, when it came time to take holidays, did you go: "Oh, I'm sorry. I don't believe in getting holiday pay. You need to keep that"? I bet you I'd be hard-pressed to find anyone in here, Madam Speaker, that didn't very happily take that holiday pay to the bank. It's not like there's a holiday every single week of the year. These are statutory holidays. Over time we have said, "Yes, this is time to spend with our family," and if they take it and work, which is every employee's right to do, they get paid appropriately for that. Why would we want to roll that back for hard-working Albertans? Because they will take some of that pay and, I think, as the Member for Edmonton-South West said, buy Christmas presents because they managed to work a little bit of overtime. I know I certainly did that in my former workplace. I would work overtime to pay for some of the extra things that I wanted to have, be it a vacation, be it presents at Christmastime, whatever.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Another thing I would like to talk about around the Labour Relations Code is around this secret ballot. Mr. Speaker, this is a ridiculous conversation. I have heard time and time again from members opposite: the NDP government took away the secret ballot. No; it was always there. [interjections] Well, you all need to read the legislation because it was there. What we said was: if a union during an organizing drive was able to secure 65 per cent of the workplace with signed cards – and even members opposite have said that that's a majority; they seem to think 56 per cent is an overwhelming majority – then they were allowed to recognize the union as their bargaining unit. Okay? That provision still applied here in the House. If the union couldn't secure 65 per cent, if they could only secure 64 per cent, the secret ballot still applied. So we need to start being up front with Albertans with the language. I've said time and time again in this House about language and what it says and what it doesn't, and the language was very clear in the legislation. With 65 per cent, you formed a union; under 65 per cent you went to a secret ballot and saw what happened.

Now, I want to start talking a little bit about this youth minimum wage, claims that it's going to create jobs. The problem, from the

students that I've talked to, from employers that I've also talked to, is that if they have five people on shift to do the work at that time, whether one of them gets paid \$2 an hour less, two of them, three of them, it does not magically mean that all of a sudden that employer is going to require a sixth person to do the work that the five were already doing. They said: I'm not going to hire someone when I only require five people on shift. So, in my opinion, this is taking somebody who is 17 years old and penalizing them for being 17.

Then around some of the conditions. It applies to the first 28 hours worked. It depends on whether you're in school or not. If you're not in school, you'll make \$15. Now, it sounds like we're getting into a whole bunch of red tape, that I thought the associate minister of red tape had a mandate to look after. Promises: one in, one out; reduce it by one-third over the next four years. I've seen a whole bunch of red tape being created here, and I worry about the red tape that's now going to have to come out to try to catch up. I think the associate minister has his work cut out for him, and I wish him the best of luck because it sounds like he's got some catching up to do here. We're now expecting employers to try to keep track of birthdates, whether they're in or out of school. Did they work 28 hours or 29 hours? If they worked over 28 hours, how many did they work? Now there are multiple pay scales. Like I said, holy red tape, Mr. Speaker.

I want to start to conclude my remarks around this whole open for business. It would suggest, as I've said before, that Alberta was closed for business. Yet when I look at companies like Seven Generations Energy, investing \$1.2 billion in a natural gas processing facility; when I look at a company like Improbable, that moved their head office here to Alberta; when I see CN Rail wanting to expand and strengthen its infrastructure network to the tune of \$370 million; when I see Pembina building a petrochemical plant for \$4.5 billion; when I see Inter Pipeline's investment at \$2.1 billion – and those are just a few quick ones that I found. Mr. Speaker, \$8.2 billion of investment is closed for business? Really? So I struggle greatly with this bill.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see that the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration has risen.

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just take a few minutes to respond to some of the comments made by the hon. member across, and I feel that I need to set the record straight on a couple of issues in regard to Bill 2. I'd like to actually speak primarily to banked overtime, the youth minimum wage, and general holidays and then make some comments as well in regard to the NDP record concerning investment in the province of Alberta.

Now, the first comment is on banked overtime. The hon. member opposite indicated that banked overtime will impact the pay, and we've heard other members sort of go into the realm of hyperbole saying that. I think that one member indicated that 400,000 Albertans, because of banked overtime and the impact on overtime pay, will now need to go to the food bank. Mr. Speaker, that simply is hyperbole. In reality, this is not about impacting overtime pay. This is about providing opportunities for employees to reach an agreement with their employers to bank their overtime hours and then take those at a later date.

What the members opposite fail to recognize – and we've had this debate over a number of weeks on this issue – is that their change in the policy reduced opportunities for employees and employers alike. They didn't have the ability to get overtime pay, nor did they have the ability to bank overtime. I have heard from employers who indicated in thanking our government – and I

indicated this in an earlier speech. With the change in the rules, should this pass, which is a commitment that we made and that our government will support, then he will be able to hire someone else and be able to offer banked overtime to his employees. This was a furniture shop.

**5:00 a.m.**

I also want to talk about comments in regard to youth minimum wage and the general holiday pay. Again, this previous government's policies, which increased the minimum wage by nearly 50 per cent in the face of an economic recession, created burdens on job creators, which resulted in not only staff being laid off but fewer hours worked. The member opposite quite correctly says: well, if I only need five people, why would I hire more? What the member opposite fails to recognize is that they don't need five people; they need six people. The reason they don't have the six people is because the NDP policies, you know, particularly in the restaurant industry, where we've seen this general holiday change, which resulted in significant costs for employers, plus the increase in the minimum wage – saying: I would actually like to have six people, but I can't afford it; now I have five. By making this change, we can go back to six.

This is what we've heard from businesses, and particularly in the restaurant industry I've spoken with a number of Calgarian businesses who thanked us for putting forward this change to say: I can hire more people now because I was running short because I couldn't afford them before. This is the reason why at this point in time with these changes we will create jobs for Albertans and particularly for Albertan youth.

Mr. Speaker, we have a youth job crisis. For under 18, 1 in 5 – actually, it's more than 1 in 5; it's 21.5 per cent. Roughly 1 in 5 students under 18 are unemployed. They can't earn anything to save for school and they can't earn anything to help their families because they can't find work. Even though it's 1 in 5 today, that would be higher if you actually counted all those who stopped looking for work because they couldn't find any. The youth job-creation wage will reduce the costs for employers so we can provide more work and more opportunities for Alberta's youth to get them working.

The last comment I would like to make is in regard to the billions of dollars mentioned by the members opposite who looked at a couple of projects and said that there's maybe a hundred million here, \$200 million there, \$1.5 billion there. What the member opposite doesn't mention is the tens to hundreds of billions of dollars of investment that fled this province under the NDP.

So I urge, for the third reading, the rest of the House and my colleagues to support . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to speak to third reading? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to third reading of the pick-your-pockets bill, Bill 2, which, you know, again, there's been some interesting debate this evening on this bill. Of course, the government is going to continue to say that giving a two-tier wage or a youth differential is great for the economy. I think it's completely discriminatory based on age. We've had a number of examples that we've outlined. Depending on when a person's birthday falls, they make \$2 less than their colleague.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South talked about a person working in Lloydminster. Now, this isn't on the youth wage, but this is on, I believe, the holiday pay. That's what we were talking about. I will find this real quickly. Yeah. The general holiday pay

distinction. That's, for example, if Christmas falls on a Saturday, parents here won't get the extra pay, obviously, to cover off additional costs, but in Saskatchewan they do. So in a city like Lloydminster, where you have half and half – it actually puts Alberta out of step with every other province in Canada as far as making a distinction between regular versus nonregular workdays. I can tell you that holiday pay in every other province is owed to workers, whether it falls on their regularly scheduled day off. Again, that's, you know, B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. Alberta workers will no longer be eligible to receive that.

For me, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about, you know, pay for work hours put in, I believe that equal work deserves equal pay. It doesn't matter whether you're 15 or 55. If you're doing the exact same work, I don't understand the premise of the argument that, well, because you're younger, you deserve less money. Again, it's interesting that when you even look back in Alberta's history, it was former Premier Ralph Klein that I believe got rid of the two-tiered wage. He didn't believe that you should be paid less because of your age. Considering this government loves to throw his name around and talk about how in their opinion he was the greatest Premier, it's interesting that they'll cherry-pick which parts of it that he was so great at.

By the way, one of the greatest fallacies of the '90s was when he held up the sign that said: paid in full. It actually wasn't. What the government did was download a ridiculous amount onto municipalities, who don't have nearly the same number of tools to be able to bring in revenue. At the same time we saw an historic amount of infrastructure deferral on maintenance, which, I would argue, we're still paying for. I believe it's the Misericordia hospital in Edmonton where the roof collapsed on one of their ER rooms. This was a few years back but not that long ago, Mr. Speaker. You know, there are a number of things that he did which I completely disagreed with. I mean, he also rolled back the wages of teachers and others, but everybody talks about the good times when he was Premier.

Now, he was very fortunate to hold the reins of the province when natural gas was at an all-time high and there were record Crown land sales going on in the province, so money was pouring in. Again, for me I have this image in my mind when people talk about how he brought in the great times. I think, "Yeah; he was out around Fort McMurray putting the oil in the ground. He's the reason that the province was doing so well back then," which, of course, is not true, Mr. Speaker. Again, the times were very favourable, but I would argue that that wasn't because of him per se. He just happened to be there at the right time. Just like, again, the challenge over the last four years was with the historic collapse in the global price of oil, going from \$127 a barrel down to \$27 a barrel, which had a huge impact on everyone throughout this province.

You know, jumping back to the bill here, Mr. Speaker, this will impact roughly about 400,000 workers as far as overtime. For me, I think one of the most disingenuous things that has been said by the government in this place is that they campaigned on this. The truth of the matter is that the government did not campaign on this. They are being . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Thrifty with the truth.

**Mr. Bilous:** Yeah. Thrifty with the truth is an understatement because during the election nowhere in their platform did they say: we're going to roll back time and a half on overtime hours worked. You know, the government can paint the picture of: "No; this is better for workers. Now they can get an extra day off." Well, you know, I think that the majority of workers would rather take the pay

because, quite frankly, for many of them, especially those in the oil and gas sector or the construction sector, they factor that in to make ends meet every month, so suddenly removing that removes hundreds of dollars from their paycheques every month, which, again, is just completely unfair. I mean, this is something that was negotiated and part of why they may have went into a certain occupation that they did.

5:10 a.m.

I mean, you look at a lot of people who go and work in the oil and gas sector. When things are humming along, they work really long hours. They deserve to be compensated accordingly, Mr. Speaker. It's frustrating that the government says – especially when they throw attacks about how we didn't campaign on a carbon tax. Well, you didn't campaign on cutting overtime pay for workers, and I would love for the Premier and for his government to acknowledge that, but I think that's extremely unlikely.

What I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that I'd like to move an amendment to this reading of the bill. I will hold one copy and send the original with the requisite number of copies to the table, and I'll pause until you receive it.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment REC. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is more than welcome to proceed.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following. “Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 4.”

Now, what this does, Mr. Speaker, is give the Assembly an opportunity to amend this piece of legislation in an attempt to improve it. I think, you know, quite honestly, the title of this bill is completely a misnomer as far as Alberta open for business. This bill does no such thing to make Alberta more open for business. It should be, really, renamed An Attack on Working People in Alberta or, as some of my colleagues refer to it, as the pick-your-pockets bill. This will at least give an opportunity for the Assembly to consider making changes to improve the bill.

I always find it fascinating when members rip up the amendment in a way to say: I don't even have to read this. Well, no, you don't, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I wish members had a little more respect for this place and the fact that it is the job of the opposition to put forward amendments in order to improve legislation. Legislation like this, quite frankly, needs significant improvement. Now, I'll be the first to admit that as government I did not accept every amendment that came, but I can tell you that I did not try to make a big display of ripping up an amendment in front of a member who is speaking to it. I'll leave it at that, but I would expect a little more, shall we say, class for this place.

Again, recommitting this bill provides an opportunity to be able to make further amendments. Now, I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods brought forward a number of amendments over the past few weeks to try to improve this bill. Again, you know, I think, for myself, the section that I find the most frustrating, as I've highlighted, is the one that attacks overtime hours worked. Now, I will say that we did put forward an amendment that I was hoping would get over the finish line, which was just to ensure that from essentially today or whenever this bill is passed, workers who have worked overtime and banked it would be paid out the time and a half, the overtime. I thought that was a

reasonable amendment. I mean, they worked that overtime under the understanding or the agreement that it would be paid out as time and a half. That just ensured that contracts, whether a verbal contract or a written contract, would be upheld. So I was disappointed that government members decided not to accept that amendment, which, again, wouldn't have affected moving forward once the bill is . . .

**Mr. McIver:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, a point of order has been called.

#### Point of Order Items Previously Decided

**Mr. McIver:** The hon. member is contemplating a previous vote of the House, which I think he ought to know, especially as being the Opposition House Leader, is against the standing orders of this Assembly under 23(c): “raises matters that have been decided during the current session.”

**The Speaker:** I'm happy to rule, prior to your comments, as this is not a point of order because the hon. member, the Minister of Transportation, will know that also under Standing Order 23 it states: unless the member intends to have the motion recommitted or the previous decision to be reconsidered. He is currently in the process of asking for the bill to be recommitted to Committee of the Whole. As such, this is not a point of order and he will proceed.

#### Debate Continued

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will continue.

Again, I mean, this is part of the reason why this amendment is trying to recommit: so that there are further opportunities for opposition members and government members to bring forward amendments to try to strengthen this bill.

I'm not sure, quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, how many bills have successfully been recommitted to Committee of the Whole. I guess that's something to ask our friends that support every single member in this place, but that's for another time.

Mr. Speaker, part of other challenges that we have with this bill, again: I touched briefly on the general holiday pay eligibility, which was out of step with the rest of the country until a couple of years ago when we amended that. I appreciate that the government will say: well, it was that way until only recently; therefore, there's no problem going back to it. But what needs to be highlighted is the fact that Alberta was out of step and quite far behind every other province in this country, so what we did was to bring Alberta in line with the rest of the country, not making us move further to be a leader of the pack, but at least not to be a laggard when it comes to general holiday pay. It's unfortunate that this bill will once again make Alberta out of step with the rest of the country.

You know, Mr. Speaker, with that, I will urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment, which, again, sends it back to committee to provide all members, private members and opposition members, an opportunity to try to strengthen this bill before its passage or moving forward should the Assembly choose to vote it.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

5:20 a.m.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on Standing Order 29(2)(a) to address my comments to the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I appreciated his comments, in particular the suggestion of this amendment and going back to Committee of the Whole to address particularly section 4. I think the hon. member spoke to the impact that the cuts to overtime and the changes that are being proposed as part of Bill 2 would have on a number of workers in Alberta.

I'd appreciate his additional thoughts as to how this government has characterized the changes to overtime pay and perhaps that they were not forthcoming in their election campaign regarding what changes would be coming in and how what is here is actually going to impact Alberta workers and their overtime pay and his thoughts on whether or not that is actually fulfilling what they claim to be as a campaign promise but which I believe his statements have suggested weren't actually a campaign promise because there was a lot of misconception around how the cuts to overtime pay would be implemented. I'd appreciate his additional comments on that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for the question. I mean, you know, the frustration with the cuts to overtime is that the government continues to attempt to mislead the House in their characterization of the fact that this was in their platform during the election. Cutting overtime pay was not in the platform, at least not that I read. I'd love for members to tell me what page number it was on where it was explicitly stated that we will roll back overtime wages. The characterization that this is something workers want: I would love to know how many workers the government consulted with. When given the option of being paid out at straight time or paid out at time and a half, how many workers would say: "Yes, please, pay me less. That's what I prefer."

You know, again, what I find interesting is, I mean, does paying time and a half cost businesses more? Yes. Will this rollback save businesses money? Yes. But where I don't hear a lot of communication or a lot of comments from government members is: well, what about the workers, the workers that were counting on getting time and a half that no longer get time and a half? It's like, you know, the government loves to try to characterize us as being against business, which is patently false, yet through all of their words and actions it seems like the government is completely against the working people of this province, again, trying to pick their pockets, taking away hundreds of dollars per month from the men and women who work very, very hard to build this province.

Again, you know, the campaign promise was not a campaign promise. The government, during the election, did not come clean with Albertans as far as what they would propose in this piece of legislation and what it means to the working people of this province, again, especially those that rely on the time and a half. I mean, I encourage the members, especially those that represent areas like the Fort McMurray region, the Cold Lake region, Bonnyville, Grande Prairie, where the vast number of workers in the energy sector – the energy sector is probably the largest employer in those areas. How do workers feel about the fact that now they'll lose their banked overtime? Now, are there some workers that would trade their banked overtime for an extra day off? Sure. But making it broad, sweeping across the board is not something I think that workers asked for. It's not something that this government campaigned on, and I wish they would stop being fancy-free with the facts.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we are at third reading of Bill 2. I see the hon. Minister of Transportation rising.

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Speaker, I'm always sensitive to the feelings of the hon. Opposition House Leader, concerned that someone carefully disposed of the copy of the amendment that he made. To make the hon. Opposition House Leader feel just a little bit better, he will know very well that it's a recommittal motion and that anybody that has been around here for a little while, as the hon. Opposition House Leader has, will know that they only have to look at it for about two seconds to know what it says. He knows that I'm right about this, so he shouldn't be so offended that it was disposed of responsibly in the way that we do those things around here.

**Mr. Bilous:** Recycled.

**Mr. McIver:** Yes, indeed, it will be recycled, I'm sure, hon. Opposition House Leader, through the Speaker, of course.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that the hon. Opposition House Leader is a little bit free with his description of things. He talked about the changes being broad and sweeping when, in fact, he is actually not correct about that. The fact is that the banked hours being paid even is something that needs to be negotiated. There would be many cases where that would not be the case, where perhaps the employer may choose to give the employee banked time at one and a half or pay at one and a half or some other higher rate in some cases, whatever gets negotiated. In fact, the NDP legislation was broad and sweeping, in direct opposition to what Bill 2 is.

So I would say that, obviously, the government wouldn't be supporting a recommittal of this bill. This was very much in our election campaign. We very much said that we were going to correct the lack of the ability for employers to be able to make averaging agreements and agreements with their employees to bank time at even.

What we have here is the basic difference between our Conservative government and the NDP opposition, where we are actually willing to see their side of the argument, to say that there are some cases, there may be some cases, where someone will make, for example, \$13 instead of \$15 an hour – and we accept that – but they never seem to be able to accept the case that there are tens of thousands of cases of Albertans that will make \$13 an hour instead of zero dollars an hour. They can never see the whole picture, which is a big difference between how we look at the world and how they look at the world, Mr. Speaker.

Further, I found it interesting that the member aside took the time in his speech to talk about how he was a union rep and saw people get paid at straight time instead of time and a half. I would just suggest to that hon. member that those people might question how good their union rep was if that indeed happened on his watch.

I also found quite comical in terms of spin the hon. member talking about the 3.3 million people that didn't vote for the UCP, which of course includes four-year-olds, five-year-olds, six-year-olds, seven-year-olds, eight-year-olds – you get the picture – people that didn't vote for anybody because they were ineligible to vote. Now, if there was ever a definition of spin, the hon. member demonstrated where the spin is coming from. Well, from time to time, Mr. Speaker, spin may come from all sides of this House, but, by golly, while the hon. member was complaining about spin, he surely gave us an example of the worst kind of spin in the very same sentence during which he was complaining about spin.

Also, I found it interesting that they talked about the creation of red tape, Mr. Speaker. Creating a paycheque is a form of red tape, I suppose, figuring out the deductions off of a paycheque, but our government is actually in favour of more paycheques. If there is one form of red tape that we're in favour of, it's more paycheques for more Albertans. Well, a lot of red tape we're not in favour of; more paycheques for more Albertans we are definitely in favour of. That

is why we are bringing forward Bill 2, the act to open business for Albertans, which is what it does, which was what was in our election campaign platform.

5:30 a.m.

Now, I understand that the NDP is offended because their policies were severely rejected by Albertans on April 16. If their feelings are hurt and they want to vote against Bill 2, I understand that. But when they are trying to actually actively go against what the majority of Albertans voted for on April 16, now that's where they should actually reconsider where they're going, trying to slow down the will of Albertans, the will of the majority of Albertans. Not a hundred per cent, Mr. Speaker, but a big plurality of Albertans actually voted for what is in Bill 2, which is why we won't be voting for this recommittal amendment, because to vote for that would be to vote against the demonstrated will of the big plurality of Albertans.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see the hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few comments. Thank you so much to the member for his comments and to everybody for being here this morning. It was interesting. I had the privilege when in opposition to be a part of the Ministry of Children's Services, and one of the most profound things that happened during our consultations and meetings with a lot of those folks was meeting with people from child and family services. One of the things that they spoke to us about when they came in to chat was the carbon tax, but the second piece was actually about the need for the time off in lieu. It's a huge piece, especially for folks who are on the front lines, who are working so hard to make sure that our children are protected, that are in jobs that are extremely stressful and extremely traumatic a lot of the time. It was a very profound conversation, actually, that we had when we spoke about time in lieu versus the paying out of that time.

Quite often what ends up happening, Mr. Speaker, is that folks are trying to find other folks to cover for them, to be able to have the time off that they need, to have the vacation time that they need. It was actually child and family services that came forward and said how difficult it was for them to be able to make sure that folks had time in lieu, because it was a way better time, a way better ability for them to make sure that the folks that are on the front line actually had the time that they needed, sometimes, to recover and to recoup from very difficult files. But, more than that, it was the ability to be able to have flexibility, and that actually was taken away by the former government in their legislation that they brought forward.

It wasn't just child and family services that I spoke to; it was actually right across the public sector. The inability for them to take time in lieu is a huge piece of how it is that they run their very, very – they have budgets that they have to run within, so for them to be able to have the option of this time in lieu was huge. This isn't coming from me; this was coming from the public sector.

The other thing that I just wanted to mention quickly is that I'm a small-business owner, and we have a car wash. It is not fancy work. If you ever want a really humbling job, come and hang out with me in the sumps. It's a real fun job, being down in that muck, scooping out that water and everything else that falls off a vehicle in a car wash. It is messy, really, really gross work. Happy to do it. It was part of the business, especially when we first opened our business. It was part of the job to get in there with my husband and my kids, with our rubber boots, and scoop. God only knows what was in those sumps.

One of the things that happened, though, is that there were a lot of young people who came through our business and learned how to – it's absolutely horrible, grunty work, but there is a huge amount of ethic involved when you're a business owner standing side by side with a 16-year-old, with your hip waders on, in a sump full of really interesting, fun stuff, to try and scoop that out. You work together, side by side, and you're able to hire these young people that learn this work. It's hard work, it's absolutely gross work, but we did it together. We learned together, and they learned something from that. Every single young person who's come through our car wash has gone on to do fantastic jobs. They've gone on to school. They've learned how to do this job.

And it wasn't because of – we always paid above the minimum wage. I don't ever recall a time in my business where we've ever paid the minimum wage, or if we did, it was for a really small beginning of time because we wanted to make sure that those folks were committed to us. Once they were there for 60, 90 days and we knew that they were staying, it was easy to bump them up because, like I said, this work is not for everybody, and when they're willing to get into their hip waders and jump into the mess that is left behind in a car wash, you know you've got the right kid working for you and the right person. Kudos to all of them because it's really, really disgusting work.

Nevertheless, what they learned from that was that – for somebody like me, anyway, when you see somebody who works at that level, in that capacity, we want to keep them. I want to make sure that they stay as long as they can. Of course, this isn't a career choice. This is a jumping-off point. This is along the ladder of rungs to where you're going to go . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to speak to amendment REC? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the amendment that was proposed by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I got it right and at 5:37 in the morning as well, so I guess something is still working in the brain. I just want to take the opportunity to add some comments, some debate to this discussion. I do want to add, just off the top, that I actually wasn't that offended by seeing the members opposite ripping up the amendment, mostly because I have young children, so I'm quite used to that kind of behaviour, that attention-seeking behaviour. That actually didn't surprise me. It actually made me feel like I was at home, so thank you very much for that.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I also just want to briefly speak to some of the comments by the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women that she just gave, which I thought were very thoughtful comments. She mentioned that she spoke with a lot of the employees with Children's Services, who do fantastic and very difficult, as she highlighted, very challenging work in our province and work very hard, and how they very much indicated to her that they value the time in lieu, the banked overtime, that it's rewarding for them to be able to take that time off and a very necessary opportunity for them to recharge and regenerate, particularly after the challenging work that they do.

I guess my question would be: did any of those employees say, "But make sure we get valued less for that time in lieu than we did before"? That's the question that stuck out when she was talking. I'm very certain that employees do value banked overtime. Certainly, I don't think anybody on this side of the House is standing up and saying: take away banked overtime. In fact, what

we're saying is: value that banked overtime at the same rate at which their overtime pay is at.

I think that where we are getting into some challenges here is when we've had some discussion in this House about whether or not the changes that are being proposed under Bill 2 to the overtime pay were part of the UCP campaign, and I have two comments on that. The first is that I'm looking at the UCP platform, and it indicates that they were going to eliminate the straight-time banked hours arrangement, but they indicated in comments that this has no impact on overtime pay. Where we're getting into a bit of a challenge, I believe, is that while the overtime pay rate is still 1.5, you know, time and a half, the government members seem to take the position that time is not money, which I'm finding a little bit surprising coming from the members opposite, who often highlight their business background as small-business owners. To say that banked time is somehow different than overtime pay because it's not paid out is, I think, a false argument.

I think that's what they're relying upon to hinge upon and to say: oh, we told you that we were going to do this. But I don't think they were clear to Albertans and to workers that what that really meant, by cutting the banked overtime rate from one and a half to one, is that it does impact their pay, because if they were to take the pay, they would get paid more for their banked time. In some options they can choose to take their banked time, so they're actually getting less than what they would have if they'd taken the pay. I don't think that that was clear.

5:40 a.m.

In fact, I'm not the only who thinks that. You know, there was an article referenced. I believe it was from April 2, 2019. It's an *Edmonton Journal* article where it talked about labour experts who indicated – and there's a quote here from Angella MacEwen, who says: it's a head-scratcher; it would absolutely be a pay cut to cut banked overtime rate. The quote is: I'm really surprised given how many tradespeople are having a rough time right now; to tell them that you're taking away their overtime pay or cutting it is shocking to me; I don't think you've talked to enough people who would be affected by this. When we talked about, in this House, 400,000 workers: that's how many people are affected by the change that is being proposed by Bill 2.

The concern here is that, you know, the government might hinge upon the fact that section 22, I believe it is, of the Employment Standards Code, which talks about overtime pay, isn't being amended; therefore, they're not affecting overtime pay. I think that's inaccurate because they're actually changing section 23, which affects the rate of banked overtime. If those employees were to choose to take those or if they could, under their agreements, take a payout of their banked overtime, they actually are going to get less now. That's what we're talking about over here. That's the conversation that we don't think the government was forthcoming with Albertans about, to say that your banked overtime is your time. It is money. If you work over 44 hours in a week, you're entitled to get paid at time and a half. If you enter into an averaging agreement with your employer, you're going to get less than that. I don't think the government was forthcoming with Albertans about that, which is why I support this amendment. I think this needs to go back to Committee of the Whole for that discussion.

The other comment that I wanted to make with respect to the overtime pay is that, you know, the government members consistently stand up and say that they got this overwhelming majority, and therefore they seem shocked that we would continue to stand up and hold them to account and ask them to explain, before all the Albertans who did not vote for them and, frankly, even those who did, because this is – hey, I give credit to that platform. It's a

lengthy one. I'm not sure that everybody who voted UCP voted for every single item in that platform, and if we're going to go for four years on that premise, I think there are going to be a lot of Albertans who are going to be shocked and who are already shocked. That's why we're here, and that's why we're talking about it.

Apart from those UCP supporters who did vote, who may or may not have understood that they were actually having their overtime pay cut, there were still 600,000 Albertans, whom we represent on this side of the House, who did not support this, and our job is to talk about it. Our job is to stand up and hold the government to account despite the fact that they continue to be overwhelmingly shocked by the fact that we're doing that, despite the fact that many of the members on the other side were in opposition not too long ago and did the same thing that we're doing right now. They understand that this is our job. Our job is to stand up and hold the government to account, and that's what we're doing.

One of the things that I want to talk about in particular, actually, speaks to the youth wage cut. I'm not going to stand here and say that I am opposed to – I don't like the term "job creators" because I think it continues to categorize people improperly. There are people who are employers and employees and who are caregivers, and they do all kinds of other work. I'm not into that category, but I'm not here to denigrate the great work of people who own businesses and who employ people. There are employers of many different sizes and different kinds of work, and they're Albertans, and we want to support them.

But there are also a lot of people who are employees, who are workers, and our job, my job, is to also talk about those people. Of course we want to see businesses do well. Of course we want to see Albertans do well. We want to see employers do well, but we also want to see employees do well. We also want to see people who have been affected by the downturn in the oil prices be able to get paid a fair wage, be able to support their families, pay their mortgages, buy their groceries, send their kids to child care, send their kids to soccer class. I'm sort of refusing to get engaged in this us-versus-them idea because it's not all or nothing. We have to think about all Albertans: those who employ people, those who are employees, and those who are both. There are lots of people who are both, who do lots of that kind of work.

So when we talk about overtime pay, when I want to talk a little bit about the youth minimum wage, my job is to put a little bit of a human face on it because it's not a zero-sum equation in here. It's not that we're going to only focus on job creation and the employers but not also think about the Albertans who work those jobs. I believe it's our responsibility to consider all of them, if there are ways to find compromises. It shouldn't be that we only benefit one group of Albertans over another. We need to talk about ways to find middle ground.

One of the challenges that we face on this side of the House is that we believe that the government is bringing forward an agenda with their belief that it will stimulate the economy. As we know, there are ideological differences. There are differences that go back beyond our province, beyond just Canada. There are ideological differences about how to stimulate the economy. We can all agree on that, and we can all probably find research and studies to support our ideological perspective that will talk about: this is one way to stimulate the economy; this is another.

Clearly, the people on this side of the House do not believe in austerity economics. We do not believe in those policies. We believe in supporting and in investing in people at a time when there's a downturn, but that's not the ideological approach of some people on the other side. That's fine. The point is that there are different views on this, and there's different research to support it. If we can't be flexible and acknowledge that both perspectives have

some grounding in fact and studies and therefore it's a bit of a gamble either way, then we have to find some compromises. We have to talk about ways that we are looking at not just benefiting one group of Albertans and not the other.

When I stand up here, I want to talk about – and this is not to say that it's for certain what is going to happen, that the policies that are being put forward won't have some benefits. They may. But I am also here to talk about the impacts and potential deficits it may have, the potential negative impacts it may have on Albertans.

When we talk about young workers in particular, that's a subject that's near and dear to my heart. I appreciated the comment from the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. She talked about the young people that were in the muck doing the hard work and that they were working very hard and that she appreciated their work. Then where my mind goes is: then why do we pay them less for doing the same work? They're standing next to you doing the same work. Why are we paying them less? In my view, that story lends itself to say that these young people are working just as hard as the person standing next to them who might be just by virtue of the age, the month and the year they were born, maybe just a month younger than the person standing next to them. Why would we pay them differently? They're doing the same work. It's actually just to me a fundamental question of equality and fairness.

I was a young person. I worked, you know, before I turned 18. I was fortunate to have a supportive family, but in my family I didn't get allowances. The rule was that if you want spending money, you've got to work. If you want to buy a car, you've got to work. So I worked at a young age, but I was still privileged to have the support of my family and to not have to work to put food on the table, to not have to work to support myself. Certainly, I was lucky that I did not have to support my own family as a teenager, but we know that not all Albertans are that lucky. We know that not all Albertans are in a situation where they can work just for spending money, for a car, to save up for things like that.

My husband is an assistant principal at a north-side high school. He's been there for some time, and the kids at that school – I think it's roughly 1,700 kids now at that high school. Well over half of them, probably even more – I'd have to get confirmation of that – are newcomers to this country, to this province. They are kids who – I've mentioned him before, and I'm going to bring him up again because he's a very personal part of my life. My husband had a former student who was actually born and raised in a refugee camp in Kenya and came to Alberta at the age of 14, no formal schooling. He was the eldest of six kids. In fact, being the eldest, he had a bit of a disadvantage because he'd gone the longest without formal schooling. When he started high school at the high school my husband teaches at, he was really beginning from next to nothing. Yet beginning at the age of 16, he was under significant pressure from his family to work to contribute to the household. That was why he worked, and it challenged his ability to complete school. He didn't complete school. This young man then became sort of an informal part of my own family. He still is.

5:50 a.m.

He didn't work for spending money. He didn't work for buying a car or buying a phone. He didn't have a phone until a couple of years ago. He is now 23. But he worked because he had to support his family. He had five younger siblings, and all through high school there was significant cultural pressure on him and family pressure on him to work, and he was not alone. That was very standard. A number of those kids in that community were expected to go to school. In fact, unfortunately, sometimes the school was the less important part. The more important part, the pressure that was put on him was actually to work to contribute to the family

household because it was very challenging. Both of his parents struggled, did not speak English very well, had troubles securing jobs, and the jobs they did have were minimum wage jobs as well. So he did that. He worked, and it put his school in jeopardy. He only just completed high school last year because he was under pressure to work.

I highlight that this is one story. It's my personal story, somebody close to me in my life, but he is not alone. In fact, since being in the position that I'm in now as an MLA and being honoured to have the role of critic for Children's Services, you know, I've attended with the Minister of Children's Services . . .

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me in my response under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud in her comments this evening on Bill 2, in this referral amendment. I find it a bit rich that the member opposite has decided to talk about children – talk about children – because what I'm seeing on the other side right now is the equivalent of a bunch of children holding their breath until they get their way. Now, let me be clear that the members opposite can hold their breath all they like because on this side of the House we will not blink.

We have been sitting in this Chamber for days now debating policy that was clearly outlined in our policy platform in the campaign. We on this side of the House made a commitment to Albertans that we would right this ship and get the province back to work. We made a commitment to the 180,000 Albertans who were out of work, standing in unemployment lines, and the thousands more who have just stopped looking for a job. My heart breaks for those Albertans. My heart breaks every time I knock on a door and someone tells me: I'm out of work and have been that way for a long time. Worse is when you knock on a door and someone says: my neighbour has been out of work, and I'm helping to support them. That's the Albertan way. That's what we do. We support each other. We help each other, and that's what this government is committed to doing, to supporting Albertans and creating an environment where people will come back here to start companies and create jobs and create wealth.

Now, I find this referral amendment to be a bit ironic because it represents the overall direction of the members opposite, going backwards. They want to go back to Committee of the Whole, where we just spent hours on debating this exact piece of legislation. Now we've moved forward. We're in third reading, and they want to go backwards. Well, Madam Speaker, it is the backwards thinking of the members opposite that got them there today. It's the backwards speaking of the members opposite that was repudiated on April 16 and is the backwards thinking that Albertans continue to reject on a daily basis.

When I read constituents' e-mails, they tell me: keep going; keep fighting for us. When we leave this Chamber, Madam Speaker, we go back to those extremely normal Albertans who want to feed their families, who want to help feed their neighbours if need be. You can't do it without a paycheque, you can't get a paycheque without a job, and, frankly, there weren't a lot of paycheques going around under the members opposite's government.

Now, the member opposite from Edmonton-Whitemud also talked about austerity. How do you get to austerity? How do we get there? I'll tell you. It starts with poor fiscal management, which ultimately leads to insolvency, and insolvency leads to austerity. Madam Speaker, we are on the precipice of great change in this province. We are moving forward. We will support Albertans so we do not have to face insolvency.

This is what we have talked about time and time again in this Chamber with the pieces of legislation we keep putting forward. We have an incredible cabinet here of talented individuals, and I support each and every one of them, led by our Premier, the hon. Premier and Member for Calgary-Lougheed. Madam Speaker, in this endeavour to get the province back on track, each and every member on this side of the House will stay here as long as we need to ensure we fulfill the promise that we made to Albertans before the campaign, through the campaign, and we continue to make each and every day that we stand here. These are promises made, and they are promises kept.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, that timer is going to go. My apologies.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to REC? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for her thoughtful interventions on this matter. Of course, I thank the Member for Cardston-Siksika for his comments on the speeches from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, spoken with the confidence of somebody who would wear salmon pants in this Legislature. There's only . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yes?

#### **Speaker's Ruling Insulting Language**

**The Deputy Speaker:** I will ask you, as you will know, not to insult other members of this House. I will ask that you apologize and withdraw your comment.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I apologize and withdraw, Madam Speaker.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Schmidt:** I want to talk about some of the false premises, I think, that this bill has been built around, Madam Speaker, and that were outlined in the speech that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed gave when we moved to third reading on this. You know, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed continues to make a number of arguments about why we need to pass this bill.

The first one was that the Alberta NDP left nothing but economic devastation in its wake. He continues to talk about some of the statistics to support that argument. Of course, it's interesting because one of the nice things about the government of Alberta is that it's incredibly transparent with economic statistics. In the calendar year of 2018 – so this is a year that was completely under our watch, Madam Speaker – the GDP for the province of Alberta was \$335 billion, which was the second-highest GDP in the history of the province. The only time it was higher was in 2014, and that was \$338 billion, so a difference of \$3 billion between the highest GDP, which was achieved under Premier Redford, and the second-highest GDP, which was achieved during our time in government.

Not to downplay the seriousness of the years in between, 2015 and 2016 and 2017 were challenging years. There's no doubt. There were certainly some significant headwinds that the economy faced, and there were certainly a number of people who lost their jobs in that time. [interjections] You know, Madam Speaker, the economic statistics show that . . .

6:00 a.m.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members.

**Mr. Schmidt:** . . . the unemployment rate is 6.6 per cent right now, which is about average over Alberta's history. And, you know, we also have right now in Alberta more Albertans than ever working. The end of 2018 had more Albertans than ever employed. [interjection] I can hear some skepticism from members opposite, and I encourage them to go to the open.alberta.ca website to look at the statistics that are collected by their own government, Madam Speaker, to confirm that what I'm saying is true.

I know that there are a significant number of unemployed people, and we want to make sure that those people get back to work as well, Madam Speaker, but to say that we were an economic disaster is patently false. We had, like I said, the second-highest GDP ever in the history of the province in 2018, and we had more Albertans working than ever before in 2018. By those two measures, of course, I could say that the economy was stronger than it would have been under a set of austerity measures that another government of another political persuasion may have chosen.

You know, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, of course, talks about the economy being so bad that Albertans left the province in droves. So I looked that number up as well, Madam Speaker, and it turns out that that's not true at all. It turns out that net migration into Alberta was positive for every year that we were in government and that, in fact, net migration out of the province of Alberta hasn't occurred since before 1995. I'm not sure where the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is getting his numbers, but he's not using his own government's numbers when he makes those claims.

You know, I freely admit and I think all of our caucus members would admit that the economic headwinds that Alberta has faced over the last few years have been quite strong and that many Albertans have struggled to make ends meet. We certainly did our best to make sure that we helped out all of those Albertans who were struggling to make ends meet by making sure that their public services were strong, that they could rely on the social safety net in their time of need.

You know, we often hear this line of argument that Alberta is on the precipice of insolvency. Of course, that's also patently false. We have the strongest balance sheet of any province in the country by a long shot, and our path to balance was working. As the fourth-quarter update at the end of June showed, we were actually beating even our own estimates to get back to balance. This idea that Alberta's fiscal situation is a disaster is not true if you compare Alberta's situation to other provinces in the country.

Then the Premier talked about some of the other so-called policies that we used to pile on that made businesses struggle. You know, we had the audacity to raise corporate taxes to the average corporate tax rate in the country. We had the audacity to lower the small-business tax rate from 3 to 2 per cent. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed continues to call this a payroll tax, but it's, in fact, the Canada pension plan, that we supported the federal government in improving because, oddly enough, Madam Speaker, members of our caucus believe that every Canadian should be able to retire in dignity. Having a strong Canada pension plan in place for every working Canadian and every working Albertan is a really important part of making sure that we have the ability for every Canadian to retire in dignity.

Let me just take the opportunity to remind all members of the House that, you know, if we don't give strong pensions to Canadians, then they have to fall on the social safety net to be able to look after themselves in retirement. If they can't afford to pay for their own houses, then they have to live in government-subsidized affordable housing for seniors. If they can't afford to pay for their own prescriptions and their own medical benefits, then they have to rely on Alberta seniors' benefits. If businesses don't pay those costs by making a small adjustment in the Canada pension plan to make

sure that Canadians can retire in dignity, then that falls onto the taxpayer. We don't think that that's a fair sharing of the burden. We thought that that was a burden that was more fairly shared by making sure that we supported some small improvements to the Canada pension plan.

You know, the economy isn't nearly as bad as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed likes to portray. This illustration, this supposed piling on of regulations that made businesses flee the province in droves never really happened. In fact, we made important changes that supported working Albertans to be able to look after themselves better.

Then, finally, he, you know, supposedly pulled back the curtain on our secret agenda, that – shock and consternation – the Alberta NDP is aligned with labour unions and that we're opposing this bill because we don't like the changes to the labour union certification system that's imposed.

**Mr. Hanson:** The AFL sits on your board.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I heard the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul say that the AFL sits on our board. That's absolutely true, and we're proud of our alignment with the labour union. In fact, I will walk down the member's hometown with a T-shirt that says as much, if he dares to invite me to come and visit him, because I'm proud to align myself with working people in Alberta. I hope that all members of this Legislature would be proud to show their support for working people in Alberta.

In fact, you know, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed suggested that we are somehow against workplace democracy because we're taking away the secret ballot vote on labour certification. Well, Madam Speaker, of course, as I've said before, we are social democrats. We, in fact, believe that workers should have more say in the economy, more power in the economy over their working lives and not less. That's why we support the labour movement, because it's only through the labour movement that people have the collective power to negotiate better wages and better working conditions for themselves and have more say in their working conditions and exercise their democratic right in the economy, the point being that there are a number of false premises.

Because of those false premises I think it's good that we vote in favour of this amendment to send this bill back to committee so that we can, you know, take a cold, hard look at the facts and realize that perhaps the objectives that the members opposite seek to achieve will not in fact be achieved by these measures and reconsider whether or not these things should come into force.

As I've said, Madam Speaker, you know, we are very concerned about the state of the economy. We want more Albertans to be working, and there's nothing in this bill that will actually achieve those things. There is not one economic forecaster out there who's saying: "You know what? We need to take overtime pay away from working Albertans to improve the economy."

**6:10 a.m.**

What economic forecasters are saying is that the big thing that's holding Alberta back is access to foreign markets for our energy resources and the low price of oil. Those are issues that we sought to address with a number of our interventions in the oil and gas sector, including crude oil production cuts and the oil-by-rail deal, Madam Speaker. Of course, the government doesn't see fit to give those things the time to play themselves out and is instead intent on ripping up contracts because of their ideological commitment to the private sector at all costs.

Madam Speaker, you know, of course, I'm an optimist. I hope that the members opposite take a good, hard look at what we really

need to do to get this economy moving and ask themselves if lowering wages for young people, lowering overtime pay for hard-working Albertans, and weakening labour unions are actually the way to get the economy moving. I think that if they put the time in to reflect on this question and look at the consequences of the measures in this bill, then they'll vote to send this bill back to Committee of the Whole so that we can go back and fix a lot of the things that are wrong with this bill and really tackle the issues that are facing the economy, that are facing unemployed Albertans and get people back to work and get this economy going again.

Madam Speaker, with that, I will conclude my remarks.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Yes, Madam Speaker. I appreciate it. I've been pretty quiet over here for the last couple of weeks, and I have a really good vantage point of listening to what the opposition has to say, regardless of my tinnitus in my ear or otherwise. It's very difficult, honestly, to sit here, to listen to what's being said, and to be able to talk to the folks in my constituency about how this place works. It seems that our understanding of what a debate is vastly different. My understanding: it's a dialogue. What I've heard here is a skewed monologue of what reality is. Perhaps it's because there is an insular point of view, sitting in the city of Edmonton, for some of the members. They don't quite get out to the borders.

I have the privilege of representing Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, which actually borders the city of Edmonton. I get to go home. I'm part of my community. I'm still part of my constituency, and I get to travel all of 45 minutes, one way, to get home every night or in the day or whichever hour it is. During my travels I get a chance to engage my constituents. What they are going through and what they've experienced over the last four years is completely different than what's being articulated in here from the members opposite.

Acheson industrial park literally is on the border of Edmonton. You have really good, well-established businesses there. You have new opportunities there, everything else. I was sent, by a constituent of mine – and the unfortunate part is that this isn't unique. The item that this gentleman sent to me is not unique. It's not an uncommon story. This is coming from gentlemen and ladies who build our highways and are part of that industry and have been entrenched for a number of years.

If I may, Madam Speaker, I'd like to read this, and I will table it afterwards. He's an owner of this company that's been around for a number of years.

I hope things are going well in the legislature and I hope [that] they, the opposition, are not keeping you guys up all night yet. Obviously, this was written back on the 26th, and we've all experienced a bit of a filibuster, I guess.

What I am emailing about is the sad state of our industry . . . which, again, is the road construction industry, which we utilize on all those highways and byways that we have across the province.

I just heard a rumour yesterday that [company X] Construction . . .

I'm not going to mention their name.

. . . is quite possibly going into receivership very soon. [The sad part:] . . . they are a company that has been [around and] a big part of the Alberta construction industry since 1939, [over] eighty years. I have also heard they are just the tip of the iceberg in our industry. I know you're working hard to do what you can to help this sector of our province, but it may be and is too late for many of us. In the past couple of years there have been many construction companies that have gone out of business, and it appears there are many more to come.

I know you can't turn things around on a dime, and the last government just plainly didn't give a . . .

I'm not sure if I can say the word, but it's what a beaver makes. . . . but can you tell me when we can expect an improvement in our industry?

Again, because of the last government not really – this gentleman put it quite well, articulating that they just didn't care. We'll phrase it as that.

I really hate to tell you this, but our company may very well be one of those that can't survive. I have told my partners that I think we should just finish the work we have and shut it down, sell everything off before all the equity is gone and the bank takes over. Everything I have is in this company, and I could end up with nothing to show for all the years of long days and long nights of very hard work.

We need resolutions on claims [that they have out there] just to keep the lights on, and it is not happening.

That was being dragged out, again, on the other, the former government's, watch.

I am sorry to tell you this, but I think we may be another casualty of Trudeau's and [the former NDP Premier's] anti-business, anti-entrepreneurship policies. We are, as many others, on the brink.

I have always been an optimist and looked to a bright future, but I just can't see any brightness in the near future. Literally, the government has put us out of business or will in the near future.

Again referring to the last government's former policies.

I know you are doing everything you can to try and turn things around, and I know you are working very hard for Albertans. I know all that. I'm just telling you that it may be too late for a lot of people and companies.

Then I get a phone call from another constituent, and he's telling me about the industrial sector. This is not an uncommon story. We might want to talk about how many jobs we created, but flipping burgers isn't the same as . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment REC? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is truly my pleasure this morning to speak toward this motion to recommit Bill 2. I think it's something important that we get on the record and that we speak to how important going back to committee would be so that we can make this bad bill better.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I think there was something that is kind of interesting that we've seen play out over the course of the last few hours and indeed the last 23 days I believe it is now that we've been in this Assembly. I believe it's an interesting observation that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, the hon. Premier, and many members of the government have spoken at length in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, about how there was an election on April 16 and that because there was an election on April 16, the opposition isn't respecting democracy. Well, here's the wake-up call for the government: this is what democracy is. It is being in the Legislature debating bills. That's what you learn in grade 6, that there are the three readings and committee and Royal Assent. That is the process of how a bill becomes law. The wake-up call for the government today is actually that they are incorrect. Democracy is actually the process of debate, the process of passing our bills. One of those is Committee of the Whole, and one of those is where we are right now, third reading.

I believe that we should return to Committee of the Whole. That's why this amendment is so important. Democracy is accepting and having that debate in this Assembly and having that discussion and not just crumpling up our amendments, as the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is doing right now, and actually literally throwing

away the very process of democracy, literally tossing in the garbage, not even figuratively, Mr. Speaker, but literally throwing away the democratic process into the trash. That's how the government views the democratic process. They think it's a waste of paper, they think it's a waste of time, and they have a complete disregard and great disrespect for this Assembly, for the people that sent elected officials here, 24 opposition MLAs, one of the largest oppositions in Alberta's history, the third-largest vote share ever received in Alberta's history.

That is the process of democracy, being here debating those bills. They can whine and complain about these late nights as much as they want, but that is what we were sent here to do, Mr. Speaker. We were sent here to have those debates, to ensure that bills were the best they possibly could be, and when they weren't, that we go into committee and that we would reconsider them, that we'd make the changes that make bills better. That is why we were sent here.

6:20 a.m.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Premier, before he was elected Premier, before he was sent here by his constituents as Premier and by Albertans as Premier, indeed told his caucus that. He said to his caucus that you will miss graduations and birthdays and anniversaries and that there will be long nights and long days where you are in Edmonton in the Legislature. Unfortunately, it seems that the government caucus has completely forgotten that their job is to actually be here debating these bills and understanding what goes into legislation and understanding the five stages that make a bill become a law and being part of democracy. It appears that the government believes that because they won the election on April 16, they can rule by proclamation and no longer need to come to this Assembly and do their jobs.

Unfortunately for the government, Mr. Speaker, the opposition will be here to hold them to account. The opposition will be here to do our jobs and ensure that legislation is thoroughly debated in this Assembly, and we will be here as long as is necessary to ensure that this legislation gets the light of day and gets the understanding that it requires, which is why I support so strongly that we send this back to committee.

As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar spoke at length about earlier today, Mr. Speaker, it appears that the government seems to have a misunderstanding of basic truth, of basic fact. The very reports that the government is releasing and has just released last week: the fourth-quarter report, for example, shows that indeed the province was reducing its deficit at a greater rate than expected. Beyond that, the Premier today actually got up and spoke at length about how there was a net negative migration in this province, and that's simply untrue. The Premier was either incorrect and did not know the truth yet chose to speak in this House, or he decided to mislead Albertans. Either of those, I think, is unacceptable.

Certainly, I think that when we look at the truth and we look at the facts of the matter and we look at the information that's presented before us, we can see that this province was on track to recovery. It was on track to making sure that we had good-paying jobs. What Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, or really what it is, An Act to Pick the Pockets of Everyday Albertans – when we look at what this bill actually does, it does not put us on track to recovery. It does not put us on track to protecting jobs or improving the economy. It's something that's very interesting, that we can see this as a repeated action by the government. That's why I think it's so important for us to go back to committee and reconsider this bill, to have the debate and have that thorough discussion about why this bill needs to have more time.

We can look at other situations, Mr. Speaker, of how the government has absolutely failed to protect jobs. We can see, for

example, in crude by rail that they actually don't care about trying to get our product to market. They would willingly shut down a route for our oil to get to market. That's something that I think is very shameful because that is something that would have protected jobs. We would have actually been able to protect jobs if we could have moved more barrels, but instead the government chose not to. They didn't only choose not to; they boasted about not moving more barrels.

When we compare An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business to actual measures that could have created jobs or protected jobs, we can see very clearly whose side the government is on. The government is not on the side of ordinary Albertans, workers, people who actually work in Alberta. Instead, the government is on the side of wealthy donors. Instead, the government is on the side of their friends. Instead, the government would rather go out and pick the pockets of the workers who are young, who are working overtime, who are trying to pay for their holidays, for their Christmas presents, Mr. Speaker.

That's something that I think is very shocking. It's shocking that a government that purports to be caring about jobs, the economy, and pipelines would immediately both then turn around and reduce the number of barrels that get to market and also go out and say, actually, to all the people that are working in Alberta: "With Bill 2, we're going to pick your pockets. We're going to take away the toonies from the kids, and we're going to take away your holidays as well. We're going to ruin Christmas for you because now you're not going to be able to afford the presents." That's something that's actually shocking.

It's shocking that the government would be so arrogant, that they would be so arrogant to think that because they won an election, by proclamation they can go in and pick the pockets of every single Albertan, over 400,000 workers, that they would be so arrogant to think that young people deserve less for the same work, that they would be so arrogant to think that you shouldn't be allowed to have the time and pay and do holidays, Mr. Speaker, so that when Christmas comes around, you're not able to afford the Christmas presents for your kids.

The absolute arrogance of this government and complete disrespect for the democratic process – because this is something they should have learned in grade 6, Mr. Speaker. I know many grade 6s that I've spoken to over the last five years understand that democracy is coming to this Chamber and having that debate and listening to the debate and participating in the debate. They absolutely understand that. Unfortunately, it seems like the government benches don't understand that, and government backbenchers like the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland don't understand that his actual job is to be in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, you will note that in the standing orders the only thing we actually get paid for is being in this Assembly, and to receive a dock in pay is when you don't attend this Assembly. Our actual only job, as laid out in the standing orders, is to be here and debate bills and pass laws. That is why we were sent here by our constituents. We were sent here to ensure that we have the best possible law for all Albertans.

Unfortunately, it looks like the government doesn't believe that. The government believes that the laws they pass are perfect the first time through, that it doesn't need to go to committee, that we definitely don't need to recommit it to committee. Unfortunately, it seems the government thinks that because they won the election, they can go by proclamation. Luckily – luckily – for Albertans, the opposition is here to hold them to account. The opposition is here to show them and teach them. Perhaps they missed that day in grade 6. I know it was a long time ago for some of them. Perhaps they missed that day in class, and they forgot what democracy was. They

forgot what a parliament was, what a Westminster parliamentary system was, Mr. Speaker. Luckily, the opposition is here to teach them and to show them how democracy works, how we are going to try and move amendments and how we are going to try and make bad bills better, how we're going to try and Febreeze some of these bad bills. Luckily, we're going to be here to hold them to account every single step of the way, and we are willing to stay for as long as it takes.

Even though we hear government members complaining about the late hours and complaining that they have to miss school, anniversaries, graduations, whatever it is, even though their own leader had told them that would happen, we know that this right here is what we were sent here to do. We were sent here to ensure that we don't pass bad laws. This is a bad law, which is why it needs to go back to committee and needs to be fixed. It needs to go back to committee and be recommitted so that we can have proper amendments made, so that we can look into saying that perhaps young people for equal work should receive equal pay, that when you have a holiday, you should be able to afford Christmas, that when you work overtime, we shouldn't try to take your money away, that we shouldn't try to take over \$2,500 away from 400,000 Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

These are very simple things. These are things that are in place in the vast majority of other provinces. In fact, when we look at our neighbours both to the west and to the east and then to the east again, when we look at Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, the vast majority of provinces, including the two provinces with the largest populations of this country, already have these protections in place. What this legislation does is that it puts us behind the pack in worker protections, worker rights.

It is absolutely shameful that the government thinks that's okay. It shows very clearly who the government is standing up for. They're standing up for their wealthy donors and friends. They are not on the side of ordinary working Albertans. The government can say, "Well, the opposition is in this insular dome, and they don't get the issues," but I challenge you, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps the government should actually go out and consult with people instead of just their membership and instead of just their friends and donors. Perhaps they should go out and understand that when you take away overtime pay, it will absolutely affect their paycheques. It will absolutely come out of their pocketbooks. When you go in and when you affect their holiday pay, that affects their pocketbooks. It actually goes after ordinary Albertans.

I know that's sometimes a difficult concept for the government to understand, but that's why we're here explaining it for them today. That's why we're here debating it in this Assembly. That's why we're showing them how democracy works. We're going to show them that they need to understand these issues. I know that many of the members of the government benches, who were perhaps here in the 29th Legislature and before, understand this because they spent quite a bit of time, yourself included, Mr. Speaker, speaking at length, when you sat on this side of the Chamber, as to why you believed our bills were insufficient in certain ways.

Clearly, we believe that this bill, Bill 2, An Act to Pick the Pockets of Everyday Albertans, is insufficient in many ways, which is why it needs to go back to committee and why it needs to be amended significantly, so that it doesn't pick the pockets of ordinary Albertans, so that it doesn't attack ordinary families and doesn't go after young people, doesn't go after ordinary workers and tradespeople and those who work overtime or perhaps have a holiday.

**6:30 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, that's something that is very important. It's very important that we understand the ramifications of our bills. If the

government truly understood what the pick-your-pockets bill did, they would not pass it. They would be glad to go back to committee, and they would be glad to make the changes that wouldn't affect ordinary Albertans in such an adverse way. They would be glad to be able to understand that this actually attacks ordinary families. Unfortunately, the government either doesn't understand what their bill does, or they don't care what their bill does. It seems that they're listening to their wealthy donors and friends and not the pleas of ordinary Albertans. They don't understand what their bill is actually doing, or they don't care. Either of those is possible. I wouldn't pretend to know which one it was. But they either don't understand the ramifications, or they don't care.

When they go in and pick the pockets of ordinary Albertans, 400,000 Albertans will see that \$2,500 reduction in their pocketbook. Young people will see those toonies being taken right out of their pockets by this government, Mr. Speaker, and around Christmastime this year we'll see people suddenly realizing that they are not receiving the pay that they were expecting to pay for the new whatever the toy of the year is going to be. That's something that is very important here.

It's very important that the government understand the direct ramifications for families. This isn't only about their wealthy donors and it's not only about their friends; it's about ordinary Albertans. It's about standing up for working people. It's about fighting on behalf of working people. We have a government that purports to be fighting for jobs, but instead of fighting for jobs, what we see is a bill that directly goes after the pocketbooks of people who need it most, of the people who are working the hardest right here in our own province, Mr. Speaker, and that's something that's very shocking. It's something that is very surprising to me because this government spoke for four years, when they were in opposition, at length, yourself included, about how you were standing up for working Albertans, yet we see here working Albertans being attacked and having their pocketbooks picked by the government. That's something that is absolutely shocking.

We should go back to committee. We should talk about why it's not right that somebody who works an equal amount should receive a different amount of pay. We should talk about why a server differential that creates a two-tier class system is not appropriate here in Alberta. We should go and talk about why it's important . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a), I would recognize the Member for Edmonton-South West.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 2. I have had the time now to listen to the debate on Bill 2, especially listening to some of the comments made by members opposite. As someone who has had a lifetime career dealing with employee-related issues in the labour and employment world, I have had the privilege of working as an employment standard officer. I've had the privilege of actually writing policies and reviewing legislation and employment and labour standards for this province, and I have had the privilege of having to represent employees in all levels of administrative tribunals, the Court of Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal. You know, I have appeared before the Human Rights Commission, the employment standards and labour relations board, and, as I said, the Court of Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal. I can tell you that precisely because of all of those things is the reason why I am so proud of my support for Bill 2.

The members opposite will always want you to believe that they are, you know, advocating for employees. Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. The NDP are not advocating for the best interests of employees; they are here to protect the interests of their union

bosses. If you drill down to the philosophical and intellectual argument that I have had the opportunity to listen to from the members opposite, then you ask yourself: if it is true that they are here to defend the interests of the employees, why would they pursue policies that lead to job losses for the same employees they claim to be advocating for? It doesn't make sense.

On youth minimum wage they presided over an economy that saw more than 55,000 of our youth out of work because of the increase by nearly 50 per cent of the minimum wage. Our youth, that ought to be employed to have the experience to be able to build a successful future, are struggling to find that first-time employment. The majority of our youth are employed by those in the service industry, but I have sat here and listened to how they demonize the service industry, the same people that they expect to employ the same people they claim to be advocating for. It doesn't make sense.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about overtime pay. Let's be clear. As someone who lives and breathes not just from the policy world, from the legislation world, and from the litigation aspect of what they are talking about, Bill 2 preserves the right of employees to overtime pay. What they have failed to understand is that there is a distinction between that minimum provision for overtime pay and overtime agreements. Two different things. If you go to the Employment Standards Code and the regulations made pursuant to that particular code and what we've proposed, nothing is going to impact the right of employees to overtime pay.

Instead, as part of our platform efforts to kick-start our economy, to say that employees and employers need the flexibility in those few circumstances in which they decide to enter into an overtime agreement by consent, voluntary consent of both parties, not by force, as they would . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, Member.

Members wishing to speak to the amendment on Bill 2? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me here to speak to the amendment to recommit to Committee of the Whole Bill 2, An Act to Pick Albertans' Pockets. I was interested in the comments from the Municipal Affairs minister here around the union stuff because, obviously, my background is there, so I know a little bit about that. When we look at restoring the mandatory secret ballot for union certification and the 90-day period for unions to provide evidence of employee support for certification, if you want to do a little bit of homework, you could look at all the labour relations challenges that have been launched because of employer intimidation of employees. This is something that occurs on a regular basis. I've seen it myself, where employees are trying to form a union and during that period of time, during that certification process, you know, you see the company firing the people that have tried to start this drive. I have. This is why this kind of language concerns me.

If, at the end of the day, employees don't want a union, they'll just simply say no. But when they're starting to form a union – I mean, my own president, when I was a part of UFCW local 401, was driven off the road by a group that was hired by an employer trying to fight a union. Are you telling me that that's appropriate? It was because these conditions had existed. To recommit to committee we get the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to re-examine some of these things.

**6:40 a.m.**

I used to hear this a lot: that we would move too fast, we weren't thinking things through with legislation, and we, you know, weren't

accepting common-sense amendments and all that stuff. So I can't help but notice that there's a little bit of a reoccurrence of that pattern. If you're going to claim that "this group is doing it wrong" and "that's not the way" and "you need to be doing it this way" and then you get that opportunity to actually act on that but then you go back and just do the same things, well, now I kind of question your credibility on what you were actually arguing about to begin with.

By going back to the Committee of the Whole, we get to look at things like the general holiday pay. I've always seen examples where the bad actors – I'm not saying it's everybody because it's not. There are some fantastic employers out there. I know that one of my closest friends is an amazing employer, and – surprise, surprise – I think he's got almost every single one of his original employees from when he first opened his business because they don't want to leave. He treats them great. He's the example that we need to follow.

Costco, I mean, I hold them up all the time because they have an under 2 per cent turnover rate. They pay their workers well. They give them benefits. They've got good working conditions. They treat them with dignity and respect. Surprise, surprise, nobody is going anywhere, and the company is flourishing big time because employees become your own free advertising. They talk about the workplace that they're in, how great they get treated.

They end up taking that money, and they spend it in the local economy. I know for a fact that there's a good, significant portion of my residents of Edmonton-Decore that do not take their money, squirrel it away in a Cayman Islands account somewhere, waiting for that next big investment opportunity that they hear about from Warren Buffett on the news. It doesn't happen. They spend it on the things they need, and when they have that money in their pocket, they also get the opportunity to spend it on the things they want: the big-screen TV, you know, the more updated vehicle, or maybe they want to buy an RV. I don't know. But then they have those opportunities to choose that. They're not stuck choosing: well, do I pay the rent this month, or do I maybe cut back on my groceries?

We've heard that story from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud with that kid trying so desperately to go through high school, but the pressure to go back to work to try to help the family – well, wouldn't it help the family more if that student was making \$15 an hour, not \$13 an hour? Then maybe because he's making those wages, that pressure reduces, and he'd make better decisions about trying to stay in school, finish it off, maybe even head on to postsecondary and make an even bigger impact in the economy when he's done. Going back to committee with this recommittal helps us to reanalyze things like that.

As I said, the whole changes around the Labour Relations Code: we really need to rethink that. I just finished giving just one example of what I think is a very inappropriate response from an employer, to drive somebody off the road just because they don't want a union in there.

I've always said that if you're a good employer – Costco here in Alberta is not unionized. Why? They're a good employer, pay people well, treat them well, good working conditions. If you provide those kinds of things – you're right – you don't need a union. But you do when you see things like employers bouncing paycheques to their employees. You do when you see things like: "Well, we're changing the dress code, you know, so we want that skirt to be a little bit higher. We want that top to be a little bit lower." You need a union because that's unacceptable. Making it harder for those employees to band together to say, "Hey, what you're doing is not right" – you want those people to have that access and not make it harder.

As I've stated before, I'm very concerned about this youth minimum wage. I feel that it's very, very discriminatory because of

your birthday. I mean, seeing somebody – and I think it was the minister responsible for the status of women – talking about these hard-working people, yet there they are in the muck, getting dirty, but: well, your birthday was in December, but this person's birthday was in January, making \$2 dollars an hour less doing the exact same job. Come on. We're better than that.

Let's not create a situation where that kid is deciding to either go to school or help pay the bills in the family while they're getting, especially for newcomer families – we want to be able to come in, uplift them, get them on their way to succeed, and when those people have that opportunity to succeed, oh, my gosh, they take off. It's awesome to see. They're so excited about going out and working hard for their employer because they're treated well, they're paid well, and they don't go anywhere, and that lowers costs for employers, again, probably one of the reasons why Costco is so successful. There are no retraining costs, virtually, for them. Employees know their job. They know how to deal with the customers. They know where everything is in the store. People come in, have a great experience. Surprise, surprise, they come back.

You know, again, I've seen the bad actors. I've had an employer in my office, in my constituency office, telling me: well, I think I shouldn't have to pay anybody anything for the first three months; I should just get to test drive them and see if they'll work out. Come on. Again, we're better than that. Like I said, it always just takes the one to start ruining it for the rest, and with the conditions that are being proposed in Bill 2, I think we're going to start allowing the bad actors more freedom to bad act, which then puts pressure on the employers who are trying so hard to do it right, to create such a fantastic workplace, but they're trying to compete. It starts coming down to that bottom line, and they start cutting corners.

By going back to Committee of the Whole and recommitting Bill 2, we'll get the opportunity to re-examine some of these things, come up with some better solutions. The opposition is not here just to make the life of the government-side MLAs miserable. It may seem like that, but it's really not. I used to hear all the time in the 29th Legislature: we're just here to help. Okay. Well, then we're just here to help. We're trying to bring forth common-sense amendments that I think, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talked about, bring that balance so that everybody succeeds, everybody is successful, not only our newcomers but our youth as well and our businesses, all at the same time. Happy employees promote where they work.

I remember that when I first joined – back then it was Safeway. The only way you could get into Safeway was if you knew somebody. That was the only way. It was that sought-after a business to work for because you got paid well. Conditions were pretty reasonable. They tended to treat you with dignity and respect. The ice cream plant where I was was a little bit higher. We were a little bit of an anomaly. It seemed like we never had any problems there. But, surprise, surprise, there was also a union there because there were times where we did face problems.

**6:50 a.m.**

But when I look at places where people are trying to form a union because they want to get a bathroom break – for some of us that is just unthinkable. We're, like: well, that can't be. Well, that was the case. Surprisingly enough, it was the same employer that drove the union president off the road who wasn't even allowing bathroom breaks, and you wonder why they wanted – so why would we get in the way of trying to help those people organize so that they could go to the employer and say: "Hey, look, it's not just me. It's all of us"? But to make that more difficult, I think, is a disservice to the

hard-working Albertans that are working hard to make our businesses successful.

I still believe that we did not just give unions a free ride here with the current legislation. As I said, if they did not hit that 65 per cent, it was a vote automatically. But at 65 per cent we said: okay; I think we've managed to create that threshold where it's pretty straightforward that people want a union there.

It is my hope that members on all sides of this House will give this amendment serious consideration to send it back to Committee of the Whole, give us an opportunity to re-examine some of the parts that we have concerns about, that we think, in the long run, are going to hurt us as a province. It will hurt our hard-working Albertans, it will hurt our hard-working businesses, and that just drags everybody down.

**The Acting Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a) I would recognize the Member for Edmonton-South West again.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just need a few moments to respond to some of the things that I've heard from the member opposite. I mean, on the democratic right of employees to form a union, again there is a disconnect between the member's understanding of what that requires – nobody on the government side, contrary to what the member would want this Chamber to believe, is against the right of employees to belong to a union. The question is: what is the process by which they get to that particular point?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I mean, their argument is that if the union gets 65 per cent of the vote of the employees in a particular work environment, it should be automatic. But they often talk about – I've had to listen to them talk about democracy, freedom, and rights, and all of those things. I don't understand why they haven't had time to understand that this has to do with the right to vote. It doesn't matter whether it is 35 per cent or 65 per cent. Get the 65 per cent, but commit that particular decision to a vote. That is a fundamental right. So the philosophical difference, Madam Speaker, is that on our side we are saying that the employees have got the right to determine whether or not they belong to a union. On their side their argument is that, no, it is not the employees; it is the union bosses. It's not the employees; it's the union bosses.

Number two, Madam Speaker, you know, they talk about the statutory holiday, otherwise called general holiday pay. Until the NDP changed the rule, the law required you to have worked for up to 30 days. After 30 days you are automatically entitled to general holiday pay. That was the law until they changed that. The same thing with the overtime agreement requirement. That was the law until they changed that very suddenly.

Madam Speaker, in 2008 to 2009 we had the worst global recession. On average, the United States was losing 180,000 jobs per month, but Canada, withstood that global recession because we had a federal government at the time that pursued, you know, strong conservative economic policies that insulated us to a certain extent from what was going on around the world – but in the last four years they pursued policies that devastated our economy. Rather than sit back, self-reflect on whether or not their policies are actually helping our economy and the same people they always profess to help, they dug deep into their ideologies.

That is why in the midst of a recession, in the midst of all of the problems that they acknowledged, they pursued policies that made it worse: 200,000 of our fellow citizens out of work; 35,000 of our youth out of work; more stopped looking. Rather than simply maintain the status quo that would allow people to return back to

work, they went the other way. A 50 per cent increase in minimum wage: in the midst of a recession, how is it possible that increasing costs on those who create employment would actually lead to more jobs? That's just the direct opposite.

At the end of the day, Bill 2 strikes the right balance. They talk about the right balance. I would submit, Madam Speaker, that the right balance actually is making sure that employers . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are speaking of Bill 2, specifically about youth, so I would like to take a moment to speak on something specifically local and ask for some latitude from the members opposite and the members in this Chamber. It is with deep sorrow that I rise in this Chamber at the moment, and I would like to thank all members present for granting me this latitude to speak on something that weighs heavily on me today. Yesterday morning the town of Cardston woke up to tragic news that two young lives had been taken from us prematurely.

As the details come in, I am only familiar with one of the two individuals involved, and I'd like to speak briefly on his passing. On Wednesday night, shortly after midnight 16-year-old Briggs Holland was travelling to Cardston on highway 5, hoping to make it home before curfew, when he was struck head-on and killed. When I learned of the news yesterday, I was in shock, and my heart broke. Briggs was the son of Steve and Tracie, the brother of Haylie, Micah, Summer, Skylië, and Kash, a member of the Cardston boys' basketball and volleyball teams, friend to many, and friend of mine. Briggs was the kind of kid that everybody liked. In a region of the province divided by high school lines, Briggs had a charm and a charisma that could transcend rivalries and break down invisible town borders.

When I first met Briggs, it was at a 6 a.m. pickup basketball game. I immediately liked him. I always liked him so long as he was on my team. In my objective opinion, he was a damn good basketball player. In traditional pickup fashion I tried to impose my size on Briggs wherever possible, but something I learned quickly was that he would not be pushed around, and he would not back down. That was Briggs: strong in mind, body, character, and spirit, traits I encourage all of us to embody, a worthy ambassador of the Holland family name.

*7:00 a.m.*

At some point in life we all ask the question: why do bad things happen to good people? I'm guilty of uttering these words myself, and today is no exception. The answer is best summed up in the words of Haylie Holland, Briggs's sister, who is serving a full-time mission in Salt Lake City, Utah, for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I'm going to try to get through this. She said:

Words can't even express the [great] heartache that I am feeling today. But words [also cannot] express the gratitude that I feel because of the great plan God has prepared for His children. This life was never supposed to be easy, but God's plan of happiness gives us light and hope through [all of it]. I know that families are for eternity and I am so incredibly thankful for that knowledge that I have.

I'll see ya . . . soon Briggs!

It's not our will but His.

I want to express my sincerest condolences to the Holland family, the town of Cardston as this tragedy has shaken us to the core. But the bonds of an eternal family cannot be broken. In that light, we will rally around the Holland family, the town of Cardston, and those involved in the only way that Albertans know how.

God be with you till we meet again, Briggs. [Standing ovation]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any members wishing to speak?

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment REC? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. That's a tragedy. I think it just reminds you how important every day is and how important the people that you love are. I'm very sorry for your friends and your constituents.

It's my pleasure to rise and speak not to Bill 2, actually, but to the amendment that it "be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 4." Like my colleague said earlier, our job as opposition – and I think we learned from the previous opposition, at least, I did, when first it was a combination of parties and then it was one party. You know, I watched them as opposition. I had never been an opposition MLA, so I learned. What they continuously told us: I believed them; I took them at their word. They said that their job was to do a couple of things. One was to try to make legislation better, to share a different point of view. The other one was to hold them to account, to ask the hard questions, and to keep asking them when they didn't get answers.

That's what I'm doing here. Just like I said earlier, when we were talking about Bill 8, it is something that I feel really strongly about. It is my pleasure to be the MLA for St. Albert, and it is my pleasure to be here being their voice and doing my best to be an opposition MLA. I'm just sort of supporting what my colleague said earlier, that it is important. It's unpleasant, but it is important.

Going back to this amendment, why I think it's important to begin this discussion and reset a little bit and start to talk about some issues is that we're just continuing to see this trend, really. That trend is that, you know, subsidies and tax cuts on the backs of workers are the answer, sort of this trickle-down mentality that if you focus your resources in one area, which tends to be the top area, all things will trickle down, the world will be right, jobs will be created, life will be better, communities will be resilient, and poverty will be impacted.

Then I'm suddenly reminded by this, you know, statement. I think it was just an anonymous account. No, it wasn't an anonymous account. It was an official Twitter account, actually, for the UCP a few years back that posted something that said something like: we can't be a compassionate province until we're prosperous. I actually reject that idea. It's possible to be compassionate and to do the work that you need to do to ensure that all the people you represent are included in the decisions that you make. There isn't only one way. I think the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said it best, that we come to this place, we're sent here by different people in different parts of the province, and we have different points of view. It doesn't make one entirely wrong and the other entirely right, but sometimes it's about finding a middle ground. I don't believe that there is only one way, that you only invest in one area and then assume it will take care of itself.

The reason that I'm sort of focusing on that is that I see this trend of this legislation and not just this one, that we're just continuing to create the situation where the economic inequality in our province – ultimately in our country but in our province right now – just continues to grow.

Again we're seeing this government say that this bill – and that is why I think it's important that we go back and talk about it – essentially makes Alberta open for business. Well, I can guarantee you that before the election it was open for business already, and it has been for decades. It wasn't just us; it wasn't just the government before or the one before that. It's been open for business for a very long time. All of us stand on the shoulders of great people that have

come before us, that have represented constituents, the same constituents in this place. We may have been with different parties, but I think it's incredibly arrogant to say that you swooped in, the saviour, and that after the election you are here to fix it and turn it around, because it doesn't work that way. It's a continuous building.

You know, as much as I don't like to talk about and remember when we were in the throes of the recession, just how bad that was for everybody everywhere, just shedding jobs, with people just uncertain about their homes, communities – it was horrible. It was the worst recession in a generation. But that was in 2016. It was so difficult for everybody. All of us were hearing from our constituents about these things. For the government to continuously tell us that four years of an NDP government decimated Alberta's economy: I mean, I get that there's some rhetoric and there's some drama that goes on in this place, but it is important to try to focus on some fact. It was a recession. It was a huge recession.

I think what you saw was a government that came in and said: "There is another way. There has to be another way. We've continued to do it the same way for generations, and we're not getting any further ahead." We talked about Ralph Klein's days: "You know, the debt is paid, and we're at zero debt" or whatever his sign said. But we saw that in the wake of that, there was a massive infrastructure deficit that this government is still dealing with today. All Albertans are impacted by that because we all feel it in our communities. I gave this example before. One of the first announcements was that the Sturgeon hospital in St. Albert was getting some funding. How exciting that was, thinking: oh, maybe there will be a new project. No, it was a 25-year-old boiler that needed to be replaced that hadn't been for a very long time. Those are the kinds of infrastructure deficits that we were left with. This was the reality, and it was about concentrating wealth at the expense of people that really should not be expensed.

I'm going to keep saying this, that I do believe that there's another way, and wage cuts for workers so that we can create tax cuts or larger profit margins are not the way to go because we are only strong as a community, as a society, as a province, as a country when we look at and take into account the welfare of everybody, not just the people who have the most access to government or who have the most resources to invest. When you look at everybody, it's the people that don't have anything that need our help.

*7:10 a.m.*

We all know this. I think we're all smart people here. We understand that when we make an investment in school, in kindergarten, in affordable child care, in education of any kind, in housing for seniors, in income for people that are severely disabled that cannot work, we know that it's an investment in our future, financially and otherwise. It is less of a drain on our systems. It's just a good thing to do. I guess I was a little bit – the audacity to say that this bill is about being open for business when we're doing it on the backs of people that can't bear that weight: that's unfortunate. I wanted to go back, Madam Speaker. Why I'm talking about these things is that this is why we need a reset, to have this conversation, because I don't think that we've had it.

When the Premier stood up a few hours ago, one of the things he talked about was a lobby group called Restaurants Canada. By no means do I think ill of a lobby group. There are lots of lobby groups. I guess it's what you lobby for and how you do it. But he referenced this particular lobby group, and this one stuck with me because I can remember the day that I saw – I don't remember what channel it was – the interview or the people talking, and I remember thinking: this is what it looks like. You know, I don't see it all that often. Certainly, people will always come to our offices and lobby

for different things, but to see an organized lobby group do it on television – I watched it happen – and then to come here and to see the direct impact of that lobby group was a little bit stunning to me because I've never seen it up close. I've never seen what it looks like.

What it looks like is that they got precisely what they want. Whatever relationship went on, I don't know, but I see the direct result, and I see the people that are impacted. It is youth. It is workers. These are people that don't have a lot of resources, and they are not very well connected. He talked about: it's just small businesses lobbying together, Restaurants Canada. It doesn't matter to me who belongs. I mean, that's fine. It doesn't matter to me. But let's be clear. When you look on their site to see, you know, who the folks are that are providing leadership to this group, these are not, like, mom-and-pop shops. These are large multinational companies. These are professionals. These are smart people. These are good lobbyists. These are great lobbyists.

I was curious. I was thinking. You know, I looked up some stats because I didn't really have a sense of: what are we talking about here in terms of earnings and savings for them and things like that? One of the things that caught my eye is that the CEOs – again, these are not Canadians, and I apologize for that; this is from 2017 – of six top fast-food chains on average make 66 times the amount of some of their lowest paid employees. Some of those restaurants are Starbucks, McDonald's, KFC, Taco Bell, Wendy's. These are staples in all of our communities or most of our communities. That range is stunning. These are the large corporations, large profitable corporations, and yay for them for creating jobs and being innovative and entrepreneurial. It's great. But those ratios are huge, or those differences. You think about what lobbying is – and I guess that's why that was so stunning to me, to see what this group looked like, to see what the information and suggestions were, then to see it happen and to see the end result. That was just an example.

The other thing I wanted to say, Madam Speaker, is why it would be a good thing to get back to committee. Maybe I'm wrong. I haven't been on all the shifts, but I don't believe that the government has entertained any amendments from the opposition. I think some of the amendments that we brought forward . . .

**Member Irwin:** Just one.

**Ms Renaud:** Did they do one?

**Member Irwin:** I believe they took one.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. They got one. That's great.

**Member Irwin:** On the Senate.

**Ms Renaud:** On the Senate. Okay. That's great.

**Mr. Bilous:** Out of dozens of amendments.

**Ms Renaud:** Out of dozens of amendments. Okay. Not so great.

I think it's important to talk about that. There are some amendments that I don't think would completely do all of the things that we'd like to see, but some of the amendments were quite reasonable. It's about finding a middle ground. I think back to the last legislative session. I'm pretty sure that we worked with the opposition on a number of amendments, but one of the amendments really stuck with me because it was really a passionate debate. I think it was Bill 21. It was about penalties for physicians that were charged and convicted of sexual abuse of their patients. I think that initially we were following the college guidelines of steps that they would take, and we thought that those were, you know, reasonable

penalties to put in place. That would be after they were convicted and, I guess, served their sentence.

But one of the members of the opposition – it was with the Alberta Party, I believe – first suggested that it didn't go far enough, that it needed to be forever. If someone chose to engage in that kind of behaviour and they were found guilty, that would be it for them: no more licence. Of course, I remember feeling anguish, sitting back there, thinking, "That was a really good amendment, but I also understand this argument, and I understand because it's coming from the college that provides oversight and it's coming from a place of being really angry that that happened in the first place," trying to balance that.

In the end, we listened first to the Alberta Party, and I think the UCP sort of got onboard, and they continued. I'm not sure if they had an amendment or not, but it ended up, I think, that we used the amendment. Things were changed, and I know the then Minister of Health was great about it. What I really appreciated was that on something I thought we couldn't do, somebody suggested it, we thought about it, we talked about it, and it happened. That was an example of trying to find a middle ground.

We might be standing here, hour after hour, saying the same things to you or trying to impress on you that this is something that's important to us. It might feel like we're just a broken record saying the same thing, but . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I would love to just respond a little bit to St. Albert across the way there. I'm going to quote her on a couple things. She talks about, quote: the audacity to say that their government is open for business. Let's talk about the previous government. Let's talk about the 29th Legislature. You've mentioned that you think your government was open for business. Let's talk about the power of words.

Let's talk about the power of a royalty review that you decided to do, your previous government. Let's talk about the eight months it took you to do that royalty review. You could have done the simple thing and just read the last two that were written. You know, it would have given you the concept, the ideas that what is going on here is that we need infrastructure. But what you don't understand is that when you guys chose to do that royalty review, people were looking at you and looking at the people who wanted that royalty review. We have pictures of your entire government holding up picket signs saying: down with oil; no more pipelines. Absolutely. When you have people that are so anti-oil – and now they're in government – doing a royalty review, I'll tell you what my friends who work for the oil companies were thinking. The minute you started that royalty review, every single international company was looking at leaving this nation because . . . [interjections]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hey. Hon. members, it's getting a little bit loud. There are, like, multiple conversations going across the aisle. Let's listen to our speaker.

Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, please continue.

**Mr. Yao:** . . . these are international companies. You'll notice that most of them left or have very small holdings in our nation now. That's because they're looking at the big picture, and they're looking at their operations in Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Russia, the U.S., the U.K., and Norway, Venezuela. You name it; they have investments.

The only one that had a red dot on it that said that this is a hostile environment that could affect them greatly was Canada. When

they're looking at the big picture, all they see is a hostile government, a socialist government, and they think to themselves: "You know what? This isn't the place." Sure enough, they were right. Even though they stood up with you guys, they did leave. There is a certain irony in the fact that you guys chased away probably the one employer that was the leader in workers' rights and compensation and other labour issues. That's just point one that I want to make there. When you say that we're not open for business, I challenge you to look in the mirror.

7:20 a.m.

You know, you talk about the shame in having kids have a lower wage of \$2. I belonged to a union, and I know lots of people that belong to unions. Can I ask you why unions like having a probationary wage in their contracts, why they ask that new employees that come in accept a lower wage? These are adults we're talking about. These are men and women who are raising families and everything else. Why is it acceptable that they have a lower wage than the average worker in an organization? It's because they recognize that they require some level of training, that their skills and qualities are not up to par, and that there is a time where an employer has to invest in an employee to bring them up to a certain level of quality. That is something to consider every time you criticize a \$2 wage drop for kids.

Working in a fire department, part of my job was to orientate these new guys, to train them, to assess them to see whether these firefighters and paramedics were good enough and of the quality to perform in our fire department. It is a sad thing when you have to tell someone that they don't have what it takes and that with all the time that they invested in getting the education for a certain job, they just don't have it. In the career that I was in, you have to have certain qualities that enable you to perform a job under great duress, and we had to recognize that not everyone could do it, so we had to ask them to leave. Again, those guys were – we accept the fact that we have to train them up and bring them up to a certain level. Even the union, in our negotiations and our labour agreements, recognizes that they might not be worth as much until they pass some certain processes.

Yeah. Like, I could really pick your speech apart as well as the rest of the speeches, but . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** We are on Bill 2, on the amendment REC. Are there any other speakers?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion on amendment REC lost]

**The Deputy Speaker:** We are back on the main bill. Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is my opportunity to speak to Bill 2 at third reading. I want to say thank you to all members who've engaged in debate on this particular piece of legislation. Because I have so many concerns within this act, I'd like to take my opportunity at third reading to reiterate the reasons why I will not be supporting this bill, respond to a few members of this Assembly in the points that they have raised regarding this bill, and remind the members of this House who this bill impacts.

I'll begin, because just as we were debating amendment REC, as I believe you referred to it, Madam Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-South West stood in this House and shared his point of view that the responsibility of the 29th Legislature, of our

government, should have been to maintain the status quo during the economic downturn. I want to strongly object to that because this is coming from a member who has told me that he understands employment standards better than anyone else in this House given that he has many years of experience with it.

The idea that status quo is what our province needed when it comes to the minimum employment standards for our workers shocks me because as someone who knew that legislation very well, he should have known and probably did know that it was over 30 years since it had last been updated because, obviously, previous Conservative governments believed, as he does, that status quo is the appropriate way to move forward: do not update legislation; do not protect and update the protections that are the minimum standards for Albertans.

The result of this, Madam Speaker, is that Alberta was wildly out of step with the rest of Canada in so many ways and in ways that significantly hurt Alberta families. Which Alberta families? The families that rely on minimum employment standards, vulnerable families, families that needed the protections that only good legislation passed by a caring government can give. But they did not have basic minimum employment standards that mirrored the rest of Canada's.

This member stands in this place and says that the NDP government should have maintained status quo, should not have changed things. Policies that were the result of women like Amanda Jensen, a very brave, strong single mother, who lost her job when her child had cancer – she went to use the employment insurance leaves that she had paid into, but because Alberta didn't have the basic leave protections matching the federal government's legislation, again, because our legislation was 30 years old, she lost her job. The idea that status quo was the responsible way forward shocks me, and I completely disagree. For someone who says that they are very familiar with the legislation to suggest that updating legislation and making sure that Alberta workers have the same minimum rights and protections as other Canadian workers – it is very unfortunate.

Let's speak to Bill 2 specifically because in Bill 2 they are returning Alberta to the position of being out of step on a number of fronts. First, on overtime banking, if Bill 2 passes third reading, Alberta will once again become the only place in Canada where the minimum standard for overtime banking will be at straight time, impacting 400,000 working Albertans, primarily in oil and gas, in construction, putting us in a position where we know that employees often feel that they do not have the agency to be able to negotiate better than straight time banking. Although this government's members have talked about how these overtime agreements are voluntary and employees need to sign on to them, they ignore the fact that often they are signed in an entire place of employment, and individual employees do not have that option. It's often been put forward to employees as: "This is how this place of employment works. You can have a job or no job. That is the choice that you are making."

I know this because through the extensive consultation that we did in updating the minimum employment standards in Alberta, that had been left to languish for decades, we heard from workers. Workers would be calling our employment standards contact centre concerned about these employment standards. So I'm very proud that our government updated that. I disagree with Bill 2, which is rolling back that minimum overtime banking of time and a half.

I'm also disappointed in this government for misleading Albertans, putting out memes and graphics showing no change to overtime pay. Madam Speaker, to be clear, we agree; Bill 2 does not change the paid overtime. But to ignore the financial impact of banking overtime, to ignore the impact of less time with family, less

money in your bank account, because that is what banked overtime becomes – it is time you are paid for. You’re cutting that by a third. To mislead Albertans by putting out memes and graphics about paid overtime was incredibly disappointing to me.

7:30 a.m.

I would like to see us engage in genuine policy debate wherever possible and to be upfront and to have the courage of our convictions to say, “This is what I believe,” and to explain that position to our constituents, not to, through the election campaign and even afterwards, confuse Albertans about the difference between paid and banked overtime and to suggest that banked overtime has no value to workers. I can assure you, Madam Speaker, our 400,000 Albertans who work overtime feel that it has important value, whether it is banked or paid, and the change to overtime banking is going to hurt families in our province. We know that workers generally do not have the right to refuse overtime, and we know that often these overtime agreements are not set on a 1 to 1 basis with employees. I am very concerned about the overtime pay changes to overtime banking.

Secondly, statutory holidays. Once again, Alberta will be wildly out of step with the rest of Canada in that we will have workers, often vulnerable workers, who will now no longer get any benefits, whether it be time off or pay, for a statutory holiday. That greatly disappoints me, Madam Speaker. When we were updating employment standards and statutory holiday benefits, I did not imagine that that would be something that a new government would roll back.

This impacts workers who rely on the minimum standard. Many employers around our province pay better than the minimum, provide better benefits than the minimum, and for that I thank them. I know employees always appreciate that, but what is going to happen is that the workplaces that provide the minimum employment standards, which is their right – and for the record the employer who let Amanda Jensen go did nothing wrong according to the law. They were following the minimum employment standards, which is why it’s so important for governments to make sure these minimum standards are kept up and, in my opinion, should be part of looking at other jurisdictions and making sure that Alberta workers get the same rights and benefits of other Canadian workers, which has not always been the case.

When Christmas falls on a weekend, workers who work Monday to Friday jobs, 9 to 5, may not get any additional pay or any additional time off under the changes to Bill 2. That may seem like a small thing. If Christmas was on a Saturday, why would someone need any additional time off? I would argue that all workers in Canada deserve the benefit of statutory holidays, the time with family, the time to celebrate Canada Day, the time to celebrate Christmas and the other statutory holidays. I would put to you, Madam Speaker, that all other provinces agree with that. Alberta will become once again the only province where that is the case, that an employee could not receive any potential benefit. Thinking about those minimum standards is very important to me.

Related to this Bill 2 is the change to the youth wage, paying youth \$2 less than adults to do the same work. I would like to reiterate that I believe strongly in equal pay for equal work regardless of any differences between those workers, be it age, be it gender. This is a misguided policy that will not create the jobs that the government is telling Albertans it will create. The government is premising this as: the reason our youth unemployment is high is because the NDP government raised the minimum wage. They continue to quote from studies while ignoring the very real data that we have, that I have looked at constantly as we evaluate the impact of the increasing minimum

wage in Alberta, and what we see is that the youth unemployment trends in Alberta mirror what was happening in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan did not change their minimum wage, Madam Speaker. They did not increase it, yet both provinces see very similar patterns in youth unemployment, perhaps because these employment trends are more greatly impacted by general economic trends, like the drop in the global price of oil.

This government ignores that evidence and says: youth unemployment is high because of a high minimum wage, so we’re going to borrow a policy from a jurisdiction that has higher than average youth unemployment. That doesn’t make sense to me, Madam Speaker. If you’re going to borrow a policy from another jurisdiction, wouldn’t it be good if you could prove that it was working there? But it isn’t. In Ontario they have higher than the national average youth unemployment.

Now, not only are they looking to Ontario and borrowing that policy but they’re actually taking that policy, where in Ontario it’s an 85-cent difference, and bringing it to Alberta and turning it into a \$2 difference and saying that there will be no unintended consequences. Well, even at first glance, looking at it and knowing that a student will get \$2 less than a nonstudent of the same age, it concerns me that students will drop out of school because they need to . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** Is that an intended consequence?

**Ms Gray:** I hope not.

. . . support families. Now, to be clear, well-supported students will not be dropping out of school to earn \$2 more. That’s not who this is going to hurt. It will be vulnerable students. It will be teenagers who find themselves parents, teenagers who find themselves living on their own. We know that these kids are part of our communities, yet we’re putting in a policy that is going to pay them less and encourage them to drop out of school. And as a corollary, for employers there’s now an incentive to hire someone younger than 18. What is that going to do to our employees 18 to 24?

I would like to pause at this moment to give a shout-out to all of the businesses who have stood up and said: we will not follow discriminatory policies and pay young people lower than the minimum wage. We’re seeing a lot of that. The few companies that have publicly said that they will be paying less than the minimum wage to young people or the new lower minimum wage to younger people: what I’m seeing is a lot of public concern with this policy and people talking about supporting businesses that support our youth. I’ll be interested to see how this conversation continues should Bill 2 pass. I hope that the members of the government are hearing my concerns and will reconsider this piece of legislation.

I’ve talked so far about overtime banking putting us wildly out of step with the rest of the country – yes, Alberta used to be out of step; that’s not a reason to go back to being out of step – statutory holiday policies that will put us out of step with the rest of the country, the new youth minimum wage being touted as a job creation minimum wage with absolutely no proof that it will create jobs, and many concerns about the workers that it will hurt.

This bill also looks to change certification processes, and this government continues to speak about collective bargaining and unionization in a negative way, which I find very disheartening. I know, from the consultation that I did with both sides, that through the certification process very often employers will . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. It's interesting because there's lots of information and studies on both sides. I actually think the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was speaking about that a little bit earlier. What I'd like speak about for a moment is the idea that when the new minimum wage came in, for those of us who actually – like, we employ a lot of young people in our business. It's a ladder. It's a space where youth will get a really good start in a business that is hands on, the training that comes along with that. Like I've said at least a hundred times in this House in this session and previously, we never paid minimum wage, ever. It was even at one point in time because the way that we had minimum wage before, everybody started off on the same footing. It was actually even once upon a time.

**7:40 a.m.**

In fact, I can speak to my business. If a youth came in with the discipline and the ability to show up on time, put in the effort, put in the work, came with an attitude of learning and growth and wanting to move forward, nobody more than me wanted to keep that person in that job, especially because a car wash is not a place where you're going to make a career. It's a jumping-off point to a gazillion other careers, and in fact I have to say that for the youth that have come through our businesses, we've seen them grow and accelerate and find other businesses. We've written references for them. These are young people that came in, came to us, and my husband personally trained them. As a result of that, every single time when we did well, they did well. That is 99.99 per cent of the businesses in this province, and to assume anything less than that – the reason why companies are sticking to the minimum wage right now without rolling it back is because none of them paid minimum wage in the first place. They already honoured the youth that were coming through there because they wanted them there.

A lot of the kids that are coming back, like, through the Stampede and stuff, these are kids that have been there four, five, six years. I know all of them. These are kids that have worked really hard and earned the respect of the job creators that are putting in those positions. Those Stampede jobs, those are the ones that you want because once you've had those jobs, to be able to put that on your resumé, it kick-starts you into a whole bunch of other jobs. It's a great position to be able to get into. We send a ton of kids into that space to try and get those jobs because it's so good on their resúmes.

These companies are doing that because it's not about setting the minimum; we already were there, most of the businesses in this province. When we did well at Christmas, everybody got benefits. It had nothing to do with anything other than if we're doing well, if the folks that are working for us are working within an environment and are helping to bring people into our business – and a car wash is a person business. It's not glamorous, and you have to be there to be able to help, especially if you have people with young families coming in there that are having difficulties. We've had women holding on to babies trying to, you know, clean out their tires and stuff. Our staff will rush to their aid, help them with their cars, get them through. We have probably four or five door hits a week because, you know, whatever, you're distracted. Everybody's there to help each other out. These things happen.

But you have to understand, in a small business like mine I have all the risk, every little thing that goes into that. I take on every single bit of risk, and when I bring somebody into my business, it has to be because they want to be there, they show up on time, they come and work, and I'm going to make sure that if that person is doing a great job, I don't care what their age is. It has nothing to do with that. It has everything to do with environment, good work, participation, being good at customer service, being able to deal

with customers that are upset, frustrated, angry, whatever it is, whatever happened in their day before they showed up at my business. Those are all the things that contribute to a person working.

In terms of vulnerable youth that may be working, I do not know – and this is what frustrates me more than anything. It just breaks my heart. I don't know a single job creator in this province that would take advantage of that child. Not one. If a child is coming into work because they're having to support their family, I guarantee you Albertans will come to the . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, shall the minister close debate? So closed. All right.

The minister has moved third reading of Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:45 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

|                    |               |                 |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer              | Loewen        | Rehn            |
| Amery              | Lovely        | Rosin           |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Luan          | Rowswell        |
| Dreeshen           | Madu          | Rutherford      |
| Getson             | McIver        | Schow           |
| Glasgo             | Nally         | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Goodridge          | Neudorf       | Singh           |
| Hanson             | Nixon, Jason  | Smith           |
| Horner             | Nixon, Jeremy | Walker          |
| Hunter             | Orr           | Yao             |

**8:00 a.m.**

Against the motion:

|        |          |               |
|--------|----------|---------------|
| Bilous | Hoffman  | Renaud        |
| Dach   | Irwin    | Shepherd      |
| Dang   | Pancholi | Sigurdson, L. |
| Gray   |          |               |

|         |          |              |
|---------|----------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 30 | Against – 10 |
|---------|----------|--------------|

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

**The Acting Chair:** Members, we will call the committee to order.

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

**The Acting Chair:** The Committee of the Whole has under consideration Bill 8. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? We are on amendment A5. Are there any members that wish to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**An Hon. Member:** Question.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the effort from members across the way, but that's not exactly how this place works.

I want to take a moment to read some comments that I read in *The Star*, Filibuster over Alberta Education Bill and GSA Protections Passes 24-hour Mark. There are a few lines from the Government House Leader that I think are worth us hearing in this House. He says: eventually, it'll go through the House. He says: you can't now all of a sudden make Bill 8 about a different topic that it's not about, and then try to legislate and add pieces of legislation to an existing piece of legislation that have nothing to do with the issue.

Two things I want to say about that. One, the Government House Leader has got a predetermined outcome, I guess, for what he believes is going to happen, so some might say: why bother? I would say that I bother because it's my job to fight for kids. I believe that in my heart of hearts. I believe it's all of our jobs to fight for kids, every single person who is in this place. While people over 18 may have elected us, I think it's our responsibility to make sure that we create an Alberta where – we have borrowed this Alberta from the next generation. We haven't just inherited it from the last; we've borrowed it from the next. So I think it is becoming for all of us to reflect on how the changes we make impact the future generation and the current situation for young Albertans throughout this province.

The House leader goes on to say – I'll reread that: you can't now all of a sudden make Bill 8 about a different topic that it's not about, and then try to legislate and add pieces of legislation to an existing piece of legislation that have nothing to do with the issue. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from reality.

The amendment is very simple. The amendment to (2.1) reads that:

(2.1) A policy established under subsection (2) must contain a requirement that any request made by a student pursuant to section 35.1(1) is granted no more than two weeks from the day the request is received.

I've been listening to the debate, and I recall the Minister of Education saying: "Well, two weeks just isn't reasonable. Two weeks is too fast. Two weeks is too burdensome." I have to say that to say to a child who is often in difficult psychological and sometimes physical harm, "Two weeks is just too tight a timeline; it's just not feasible; there'd be too many requests for clubs, and two weeks is just an unreasonable timeline": I think that that does a disservice to our children.

I think that if we look to other children who are at risk in society, we just passed a private member's bill or motion – I don't recall – increasing the penalties for people who don't report kids who are at risk to the authorities and expanding who they could report to from social workers to also include police officers. There was a sense of urgency when we passed that motion. Perhaps it was because people have an easier time, some members of this House have an easier time empathizing with physical harm or malnourishment than they do with emotional and physical harm that isn't always visible.

Let's try to make it a little more visible. We've heard many of the stats about homelessness and about self-harm and about suicidal ideation and successful deaths by suicide. We've heard about that in this House, so if two weeks isn't reasonable, if two weeks is too fast, I think that's a very, very damaging message that we're sending to our youth. We put the word "immediate" in because we thought that that was fair and reasonable. Honestly, most school jurisdictions have been implementing them immediately. The fact that kids still have to ask for a support group is challenging enough,

but when they do, the fact that it isn't created immediately is highly problematic.

So we thought: "Okay. Let's take the government at their word. They want to work with us. They want to try to find some middle ground. Let's say two weeks." I think two weeks is long. I think it's far too long, but let's put in a timeline, at least, because a direction without a timeline is no direction at all. It's like if you said to your child, you know, "This is your list of chores," and then said nothing further, had no follow-up, had no enforcement. Your kid would say: "Well, you didn't tell me a timeline." You'd say: "Well, I shouldn't have to give you a timeline. It should be now, right?" That's how I would feel if I were handing down a list of chores to the young people in my life. "If I have responsibilities that I need you to help fulfill, you should do it now. Or let's give a long timeline. Let's say two weeks. You have two weeks to clean your bedroom. You have two weeks to cut the grass." My grass gets pretty long in two weeks, but let's say two weeks. To say that two weeks isn't a reasonable timeline, that it should be an open-ended timeline, I think, says that you're not serious about what you're actually compelling somebody to do.

When we have debate in this House and we want to refer something, we have to refer it to a place and for a set amount of time. We can't refer things indefinitely because that implies that we aren't serious about the direction that we're giving. The same stands for this simple, I would say, beyond-an-olive-branch amendment saying two weeks to act in the interests of kids and keep them safe when they ask for help. I'd say that is far beyond an olive branch.

I want to take the time to read in – some of you might recall I said to folks in the middle of the night, not last night but the night before, that if they had things they wanted me to share in the record about their experiences with this legislation, I'd be happy to.

**8:10 a.m.**

Here's one that I received from an anonymous, amazing teacher, typed on their phone while on summer holidays because, of course, this is summer vacation time. This teacher said this to me, and I'm happy to provide a copy to *Hansard* as well.

As employees of [Edmonton public], we have the advantage of working for a district that has had a strong policy in place to protect the rights of LGBTQ2S students, staff and families. We have specific bullets about confidentiality, self-identification, supports and avenues of recourse. I can't say the same about other students, staff or families in [other parts of] our province.

I am a parent of three children who have gone through the public education system. Keeping Bill 24 as is does not in any way weaken the rights of parents. In no way does the present bill imply that parents are a danger to children nor is it a method to indoctrinate young minds. It's simply a piece of legislation that ensures a child maintains their control over their identity. Isn't that what we all want? To determine who we are without fear of a policy that could put children in an awkward position, at the very least, or out them in danger of physical and mental trauma.

Working directly with LGBTQ2S children, I know the adversities they face. Recent government of Alberta stats show that 53% of LGBTQ students feel unsafe in their school compared to 3% of heterosexual youth.

I'm just going to say that stat again because I think it's a powerful one: 53 per cent of LGBTQ students feel unsafe in their school compared to 3 per cent of heterosexual students. That's a government of Alberta stat. We survey students about their sense of safety in their own schools.

This is such a disproportionate statistic but we change that in a simple way by leaving the confidentiality and the immediacy aspect of Bill 24 alone.

We know that 30-50% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ. Of course, the majority of parents are kind and loving

but this stat tells us that there is still work to be done in our society. Work around acceptance, belonging and knowledge. Weakening this legislation does not help any of our students. It simply gives parents a false sense of control and allows school district staff to act out of ignorance.

The science tells us that kids, even young kids, know who they are. If they live in fear for who they are it can lead to trauma. Fearing that a teacher could out them, could cause anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation [for an] already vulnerable child. If you've never had to hide your sexual orientation or gender identity, you really have no idea the mental energy that takes.

Mental energy that could otherwise be channelled into learning.

I want to thank that teacher and parent for taking the time to share those thoughts on this legislation.

I know that the Government House Leader has said that eventuality it will go through the House, but we can take a moment to say: all right, two weeks; two weeks is a reasonable timeline. Two weeks is more than reasonable. It's more than I would want to be in anguish or fear or sense of feeling unsafe. But two weeks at least puts a light at the end of the tunnel. When we tell kids who are vulnerable that it gets better but we won't tell them when or how or with who, they are right to not believe us. It's not okay to say: it will get better maybe sometimes at some point in the future, perhaps, because we're not actually going to put a timeline in. I think that this is a very fair and reasonable point to say two weeks. I think that two weeks is longer than we would want for any child.

When we passed that earlier motion – or perhaps it was a bill, actually – around reporting children that we know are at risk, we believed there that it needs to be immediate and that if it isn't immediate, there need to be consequences, financial and even loss of independence as potential consequences. We're not putting those kinds of consequences in this bill. We're simply putting in a time limit so that the kids who are at risk and are asking for help know that their government is serious, they do have their backs, and that at some point they will make sure that their right to form a GSA is enforced. By failing to put in a timeline, we're failing to give any backbone to the hollow statements that have been made in this place.

Again, for the MLAs who stepped up to run, who did so because they cared about things like the economy and jobs and, when the now Premier at the time was running for Premier, said that there would not be legislation on social issues: these are social issues. We're not asking you to leave everything we did in place. I get it; you ran on a different platform. But you definitely did not run on outing gay kids. You definitely didn't run on allowing their right to form a GSA to be diminished. You definitely didn't run on never giving them the kind of supports that they asked for. You ran on improving things like high school completion rates and a curriculum redesign, and while we will probably still have some different opinions on some of those pieces, I think that probably the majority of caucus didn't sign up to attack the vulnerable. Hopefully, nobody in this place signed up for that.

This amendment is an easy opportunity for that motion around conscience rights to be delivered. I know there will probably be thumbs pointing one way or the other, but I also know that – I think it was technically just two days ago but probably today, based on the sitting of the House – we passed a motion saying that we supported MLAs in making decisions based on their conscience. This is a motion based on conscience, giving kids a reasonable time limit to exercise their rights.

This is an opportunity for members of this House to show Albertans that they're not what the Minister of Transportation said about a year ago, when he said: don't let them say that we're the lake-of-fire party; they will say that we're in this to attack gay kids.

He said that at the policy convention, and he was right. People did say that. The minister of culture made very similar pleas to the general membership, saying: please don't move us backwards on the rights of LGBTQ youth. She was right. People said that this was an attack on LGBTQ youth, and here we are: Bill 8, Bill Hate, Bill Straight, the hateful Bill 8, whatever you want to call it. Here we are with one of the first bills that this government brings forward in its first sitting, and it does exactly what those two prominent cabinet ministers pleaded with the membership not to do.

I'm here to reinforce the words that they delivered to the membership. I'm here to say: "Don't paint Alberta as uncaring. Don't paint Alberta as disregarding the lives of these vulnerable young people. Show them that we are a caring and just society. Show them that we're serious when we say that kids have the right to form GSAs by putting in a limit, two weeks, a lengthy limit but a limit nonetheless, because direction without a timeline is meaningless."

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** I recognize the Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you for the opportunity to rise today on what is now well over a 48-hour Wednesday. They tell you to come and get elected as an MLA, and the thing you don't know about till you arrive here is that this place has the power to make one day go as long as we so choose. This is my first time experiencing a 48-hour day. Mr. Chair, I'm sure it is yours.

I do want to take an opportunity to have a little bit of a discussion about what the deputy leader of the NDP presented to the Chamber this morning. It is quite shocking to me – Mr. Chair, I know it is shocking to you as well, and I sense that it probably is for most of my government colleagues – to continue to watch the NDP leadership and the NDP caucus in general get up and misrepresent facts when it comes to Bill 8. We repeatedly went through the actual facts.

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

**The Acting Chair:** Point of order noted.

#### **Point of Order Referring to Members in Debate**

**Mr. Bilous:** Under section 23(h), (i), (j), this has been a ruling numerous times. The Government House Leader just referred to individual members, not to the caucus, which, of course, is a point of order. As far as "misleading," the Speaker has ruled on this a number of times. This is a point of order on which the Speaker has ruled that members cannot refer to other members or leaders in a party as misleading or to the deputy leader as misrepresenting the facts. It can apply to parties or to government or to opposition, not to individuals.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I think the Opposition House Leader is probably getting a little tired. First of all, we didn't say "mislead;" we said "misrepresent." We never referred to the members. We said: the leadership of that party. We clearly referred to the party, not specifically to the deputy leader. It's also a little bit rich coming from the Opposition House Leader, whose leader, the interim leader of the NDP Party, the former Premier of Alberta, has spent her time in this House coming up with new and different ways to be able to call members liars in the House, trying to get around the rules. It's been quite comical watching that. It's almost laughable to watch the Official Opposition House Leader try to get up to do that. Mr. Chair,

this is not a point of order. I know that you know that, and I'd like to get on with my speech as soon as I can, please.

8:20 a.m.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, both, for your input. I would just caution: let's recognize the parliamentary language and the barriers that it imposes. At this point I don't have the benefit of the Blues to see exactly what was said, so if we could just carry on with the debate, please.

Thank you.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's always great to hear from the Official Opposition House Leader, who very actively is amongst the leadership of that party. He has a major role within it though we do know, from what we've been able to see – I feel for him as a former Official Opposition House Leader as he lives through the chaos that is the NDP leadership at the moment. We saw just moments ago the Member for Edmonton-Glenora positioning herself again as she begins to position herself for a leadership run. You have to almost feel bad for the Leader of the Official Opposition as she has to continue to watch her front bench and her backbench and her middle bench and all of her benches continue to posture to try to take her job while she's still sitting in the seat.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** Point of order noted.

### Point of Order

#### Imputing Motives

#### Language Creating Disorder

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically (i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." The Government House Leader is repeatedly rising and insisting that members on this side are looking to replace our leader, who has made her intentions very clear to remain as Leader of the Official Opposition. She has stated this on numerous occasions. For him to imply that she is intending to leave this position for whatever reason or that members on this side of the House are attempting to usurp our leader, whom we strongly support, is to, as stated in (i), impute "false or unavowed motives to another Member." Indeed, I would say that it also encompasses (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Now, I could stand in this House and talk about our interim Premier and talk about the fact that we know he's only here on a temporary basis, looking on his way to take the leadership of the Conservative Party of Canada, and that he does not have much commitment to this province, but I respect the fact that I would not impute such false and unavowed motives to our Premier.

**The Acting Chair:** Please get back to the matter of amendment A5 to Bill 8.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yes, Mr. Chair. The reason that it's important to point out the bizarre behaviour of the leadership of the NDP Party in regard to the amendment is that it makes it clear why the amendment has made it to the floor, and the importance of that is that it's important for the Chamber to understand that. You would be confused if you were to listen to what has taken place inside this

House over the last 48 hours if you're one of the few people who listen to Legislatures in the middle of the night.

I know that my 90-something-year-old grandmother texted me late last night to say: what the heck is going on with the NDP? I'd be happy to table the text. I know the hon. government whip got the same text, interestingly enough, from his 90-something-year-old grandmother, trying to figure out why the NDP was bringing forward amendments and talking about an issue that is not related to the legislation and implying, sadly – sadly – to LGBTQ youth that somehow GSAs would stop as a result of Bill 8. That is not factual.

Let me be clear so that we don't offend the Opposition House Leader. That, to be very clear, is the NDP misrepresenting facts. That is what the NDP is doing with this amendment. They continue to do it. They continue to fearmonger with this amendment. They continue to state things that are not factual, and what's sad about that, Mr. Chair, is that it causes fear for people who don't have time in their everyday lives to follow the details of the legislation that is being debated in this Chamber. They have continued, as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, for over 48 hours, rising inside this House, misrepresenting facts, and causing fear with amendments like this for the LGBTQ community. It is outrageous. It's outrageous that they would do it as they posture for their leadership runs. It is outrageous that they would act this way and do that to communities like that.

I have spoken at length about this, Mr. Chair, but specifically in regard to this amendment, again, the system and the process for GSAs remain in place under Bill 8, exactly how it would be right now if Bill 8 was not passed. Six steps: a GSA happens. We talk about it all the time.

Step 1: students will ask a staff member at the school to start a GSA. That's how it is now; that's how it will be if Bill 8 is passed by this Chamber. If you listen, Mr. Chair, to them talk about this amendment that they are asking for support on, it makes it sound as if that is not factual. Well, it's disappointing. Again, for a member to do that for political gain – that's the only reason why you would try to do that – is appalling. It's shameful.

Now the second step: the principal permits the GSA. That's step 2. It's the same now as it will be then.

Step 3: the principal designates a staff liaison to support the GSA. They stood inside this Chamber repeatedly and said that that wouldn't even happen. Not factual; misrepresenting fact; causing fear. We know that the NDP's approach to politics is fear and smear. They do it to their political opponents. It doesn't work very well, but that's their tactic. That's why they're the only one-term government in the history of this province.

**Ms Hoffman:** So far.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** You know, it's interesting to hear the deputy leader of the NDP heckling on that issue, but the reality is that she belongs to a party that is the only one-term government in the history of this province. It's shocking.

Step 4: the students select a group name. That is the complete opposite of what keeps getting presented by those hon. members as they continue to filibuster and stop the progress that Albertans voted for, posturing and trying to manoeuvre for their own political gain. You know, Mr. Chair, it's not appropriate. I understand that their political party is in turmoil, but they still have a responsibility as the Official Opposition in this Chamber to bring amendments that are associated with the bill and to try to make legislation stronger. That's their responsibility.

I've had the privilege of sitting in the Leader of the Official Opposition's chair in this Chamber with you, Mr. Chair, and I can

tell you that there were times when our parties, the two legacy parties that make up the now governing party, had to go through adjustments, but we still had to come to work. We still came to work each day and fought for our constituents and did our job as the Official Opposition.

Shame on the Official Opposition for doing this. Shame on the Official Opposition for continuing to misrepresent facts for their political gain as they drive towards this leadership race and whatever the internal turmoil is inside that situation. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre wanting to rise again. Well, last night the Opposition House Leader basically admitted to his leadership ambitions, from our perspective. You can check out *Hansard*, for those that are following at home. I actually called that out and said: thank you for admitting to your leadership ambitions. While I'm not a member of the NDP Party, I do wish him the very best with that process. But he should still come and focus on his job as a legislator in here and bring amendments that are associated with the bill. He should not be telling communities that GSAs will not exist when that is not factual. Instead, he should be using his time to productively try to work on legislation in this Chamber.

Now, Mr. Chair, through you to my colleagues, I can't remember what step I was on at the moment. [interjections] I'm hearing "step 4" and "step 5" from the crew here today, so I'll just go back to step 4 to make sure I didn't miss that. The students select a group name: I didn't miss that, but I think it's worth emphasizing twice.

Now step 5: if the principal cannot find a staff liaison – remember that we've heard over and over that their primary concern is that the principal won't do what I'm about to say – the principal informs both the board and the minister, and then the minister appoints a responsible adult. That's the process. That is the process now; that'll be the process if this Chamber decides to pass Bill 8.

Then we're on to the sixth and final step: as a student-led group the students, with the support from their staff liaison, plan the next steps such as meeting dates, times, and activities.

Six steps: six steps now, six steps if this Chamber decides to adopt Bill 8. You know why, Mr. Chair? Because this province will continue to have the strongest statutory protections when it comes to GSAs of any province in the country. This province will under this government continue to support Bill 10, which was decided on by the legacy parties that make up the United Conservative Party inside this Chamber and by the NDP. That's where we'll be at. That doesn't go away.

**8:30 a.m.**

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora can stand up over and over and over and say that this bill does mandatory notification to parents; it doesn't do that. She can say that it will stop GSAs from happening – it doesn't do that – or say that kids won't be involved in GSAs; it doesn't do that. It doesn't matter how many times the Member for Edmonton-Glenora rises and says those types of things. It doesn't make it magically true. The only reason that she must be using that – again, it's the only thing that makes sense – is her political ambitions, and you see it.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair:** Point of order noted.

#### **Point of Order Imputing Motives**

**Mr. Shepherd:** Again this member insists on abusing 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." This member has never indicated that she intends to seek the leadership of this party. Indeed, there's no indication that there is a leadership

race for this party. This member insists on continuing to impute those motives to my respectable colleague here. I won't insult him by suggesting that his continuance in rising and indeed in trying to interrupt this point of order is because he himself seeks leadership ambitions within his party. That may be why he chooses to dominate debate and doesn't like to let his other members rise. I will not impute those motives to this member, but I will ask that he stop imputing motives to my colleagues.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, in response to the point of order, the Official Opposition has been accusing the hon. the Premier of planning to run – it's bizarre, but it's very relevant now to the point of order – that he left his position in the federal system, left his position of leadership of the Conservative Party, came all the way back to Alberta, fought to win the leadership of the PC Party even while they blocked him, drove around in a blue truck all across this province from basement to basement to basement, from town hall to town hall to town hall talking to Albertans, won that leadership race, then managed to get the Wildrose Party and the PC Party to make a historical merger, that caused the end of the NDP ultimately in this Chamber, thank goodness, then ran for a second leadership race in, like, a two-year period, which he won in a landslide, and then went on to win the largest – largest – mandate in the history of this province. And they accuse him all the time of trying to run for Prime Minister. It's no different.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member.

Thank you, Member, for bringing up the point of order. I would ask that we stick to the matter of the debate that we're discussing right now, which is Bill 8 and amendment A5. If we can stick to that, you have 10 minutes and 25 seconds left in your opportunity to speak to amendment A5 to Bill 8.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. It seems to be a very sensitive issue over there, this leadership issue, and I understand that.

Well, the reason, Mr. Chair, that it applies to A5 is because the amendment that has been brought to the Chamber and the arguments that are being made by the opposition, that the government is responding to, in regard to the amendment is that GSAs will not exist, that GSAs will not have the strongest statutory protections, that the hon. Education minister is bringing legislation forward that would change the process when it comes to GSAs. You've heard it. You've been in here for many of the 48 hours listening to the bizarre approach that the Official Opposition takes.

The reason the leadership race applies to that is because that's what it is, and that's a matter of debate. I understand that they disagree, that maybe the leadership turmoil in their own party is not what's causing all this posturing, but certainly, from our perspective, that's what it looks like. Again, Mr. Chair, I wish them all the best as they begin to run for leader. I'd suggest that they wait till their leader resigns, whatever. It's up to them. But when it comes to this amendment, you know, that's the approach I would take. I don't think it's very appropriate to do that to somebody who led your party to the only government you ever had. But when it comes to this amendment, you have to ask yourself, and this is the most important thing: "Why does the opposition continue to do this to the people of Alberta? When are they going to begin to take this process seriously? When are they going to stop filibustering bills?"

You know, what happened and, again, why it matters to this amendment is that you see the exact same thing, and members need to understand this when they make a decision on how to vote on

this particular amendment. You have a party who has spent their time in the last 48 hours filibustering royalty protection, that would give stability back to the energy industry, that they devastated when they were in government, or spent their time filibustering on giving Albertans an opportunity to elect their Senators because they want to continue to support their ally Justin Trudeau, who wants unelected Senators because, as you know, Mr. Chair, unelected Senators aren't sticking up for our province. It's the elected ones that are sticking up for our province.

That's what the Official Opposition has spent their time doing over the last 48 hours, and this is just another tactic, again, to continue to filibuster inside this Chamber. They're still fighting to stop Senator elections, and they're still fighting to prevent the things that Albertans voted for, to stop the progress that Albertans voted for, Mr. Chair, and that's shameful. It's shameful when you see them continuing to do it. It's shameful for them to tell the LGBTQ community misrepresented facts. It's shameful. Albertans should expect better from their Official Opposition. Albertans do expect better from their Official Opposition.

They have an important role. That's why they're here, to bring amendments. They should not be using the power of that important role, the power of being one of the 87 members of this Legislature, to come to the Legislature and use amendments like this to tell communities that they're going to lose something when they're not, Mr. Chair. That's shameful. That's a shameful approach, whether it's for a leadership race or just because they want it to be part of their regular politics of fear and smear. As I said, it's one thing when they fear and smear their political opponents. It's another thing when they cause fear to the general public. That is not the Official Opposition's job. That is not their responsibility. They should hang their heads in shame that they continue to do this, that they continue to block the progress that Albertans sent us here to get.

The deputy leader of the NDP quoted at length, while she was speaking about this amendment, from a newspaper article. I noticed that she didn't bother to also bring forward the other quotes about concerns about how much this was costing taxpayers, about the fact that – and this is relevant to the amendment because she made it relevant to the amendment, Mr. Chair. She made it relevant to the amendment. She has not brought up the fact that we have pointed out that they continue to over and over filibuster the largest platform that anybody has ever run on in this province, the largest platform.

**Mr. Dang:** Props.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Oh, don't worry. I'm not going to props. Man, they are sensitive this morning. You'd think they'd been in here for 48 hours, Mr. Chair.

Promise after promise after promise: that's what we're referring to in the article. We will put through the promises that we made to Albertans, Mr. Chair. We will keep the promises that we made to Albertans. It doesn't matter how hard the NDP fight to block them. We will do what Albertans hired us to do on April 16. I understand that the NDP are mad that they were fired. I understand that they're frustrated that they were fired. Their own leader basically admitted inside this Chamber – it took forever for her to be able to even identify a reason why she is the only Premier that oversaw a government that was a one-term government, the only Premier ever to do that in our province. She couldn't identify it. She did some interviews. She said: I can't come up with anything. Then finally she comes to this Chamber and says: well, it was because Albertans didn't like the carbon tax. So even as they're evaluating how they lost government, they're still blaming Albertans. They're still blaming Albertans. They're not looking at their actions.

Albertans hired the Premier of Alberta now and his caucus and his government to come here and to put in a set of promises, a very transparent set of promises, one of the most detailed platforms in the history of probably anywhere in Canadian politics, with a clear set of instructions on what we're to do in this Chamber. What does the NDP do after that, after being historically rejected by the people of Alberta, after losing to a party who then goes on to receive the largest mandate in the history of this province? What do they do? Do they go back and go: okay; should we examine our policies and the positions that we took and how we ended up in this spot? No. They go back to their same tactics: fear and smear, causing fear for the public, spreading misinformation to their party, causing stress for communities, wasting valuable legislative process time, and focusing on their own internal politics and how to posture themselves to their base rather than fighting for the people of Alberta.

Anybody who's watching this right now has to wonder – and we all know it's few, the people that would be tuning in at this point – what has happened to Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in this place. Mr. Chair, I respect the role. It's one of the reasons why we're still providing as much time, working hard to try to give the opposition as much time as we can to work on it. I've had the role. I understand that. But at some point we have to call it out.

**8:40 a.m.**

It is completely inappropriate, what is happening here. The Official Opposition needs to act better, and they need to respect the process and do their job. Otherwise, if they don't do their constitutional duty, then this place doesn't work the way it's supposed to work. Their job, when they bring amendments like this amendment, is to make sure that they're doing things in the best interests of Albertans, that they're working to make this legislation stronger, that they're working to provide opportunities to be able to make sure that we get this right before it leaves the Chamber. When they play political games and use people as political props and misrepresent information over and over and over, not just for a couple of hours, not just for a couple of speeches but for days and days and days and days, they're doing a disservice to Albertans. They're doing a disservice to Albertans, and that's completely inappropriate, Mr. Chair. This Official Opposition party should be ashamed of itself. They should all stand up and apologize to Albertans or, at the very least, sit over there and hang their heads in shame because it is completely inappropriate.

**The Acting Chair:** Before we continue, I'd just like to point out a couple of things. Despite what our opinions may be of the amendment, it was approved by Parliamentary Counsel, so it will be debated in the House. What I would ask is that if you are standing up to speak, you stick to the facts of the bill and the facts of the amendment, avoid repetition, repetition, repetition. Please bring something new to the debate.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House to do my job, to participate in the democratic process and indeed to represent my constituents here in Edmonton City-Centre, who, in an overwhelming majority, did not vote in favour of the policies of this government. It is out of respect for my constituents, it is out of respect for their voices, indeed out of respect for the LGBTQ2S-plus community, of which I probably have one of the largest contingencies in this province, that I will stand and speak to this particular amendment and in response to ridiculous accusations that in my speaking to this amendment, I'm here to waste time.

I'm here to speak to this amendment, providing a clear timeline in which a young person who requests a GSA or a QSA in their school would have a response to that within two weeks. Currently within the legislation it states that such a request, when it is made, will be granted immediately. That is the current law in the province of Alberta. For this member, the Government House Leader, to suggest that the changes he is bringing in make no changes is quite patently false because it removes any timeline, which is why we have this amendment here in front of us and which is one of the reasons why we have continued this debate over many hours and we have continued to come back to the legislation and continued to come back to things like this amendment, unlike in previous years, I recall, when these members sat in opposition and we had debates that went throughout the night in which that caucus misrepresented many facts about legislation that we had promised to bring in in our platform.

I remember the debates around farm safety, around bringing in safety for farm workers in the province of Alberta, and I remember the great lengths to which many opposition members went to spread fear amongst their constituents about the intent of our government and about the impacts that that would have.

That is why I continue to debate this amendment, Mr. Chair, and why I am talking about wanting to have a clear timeline for students who want to form a GSA, not because I'm fearmongering, like we saw members of the government do when they were in opposition, not because I am misrepresenting the facts, like we saw members of this government do when they were in opposition around things like farm safety or the impact of the carbon tax, to the point that during the run-up to the election members of this government were overstating the costs of the carbon tax for institutions like, say, their church in their hometown by 10 times the amount, spreading fear, which is not what I'm doing by standing here and debating this amendment and talking about the fact that this government is removing any clear timeline for young people who want to request a GSA or a QSA.

I am not misrepresenting facts. It was clear that many media have called out the Premier recently for having made accusations that we fudged the books. Many media have called that out and pointed out the fact that the recent fourth quarter came out and showed that, in fact, the deficit was reduced by \$2 billion. That, I would say, Mr. Chair, is misrepresenting the facts. That is fearmongering.

That is not what we are doing here today by debating this amendment. That is not what we are doing by pointing out that this government is in fact removing and rolling back protections in regulation to ensure that when youth request a GSA or a QSA in their school, there is an opportunity for administration or school boards or other people or a principal or anyone else involved to delay that request, to place obstacles in their path. That is not misrepresenting the facts. That is not going on and on without end, as we saw members of this government do when they were in opposition, going into the intricacies of the history of the Chinese opium trade, musing on whether people in socialist countries eat dog meat. The quality of our debate on things like this amendment, I say, Mr. Chair, has been much higher than that.

We are here to do our job as the Official Opposition, to debate things like this amendment, providing a clear timeline for young people who want to form a QSA or a GSA when this government is seeking to remove it, when this government is seeking to remove it without providing any clear explanation why and is indeed, instead, standing here and trying to claim that they're in fact making no changes. That is not fearmongering. That is doing our job as an Official Opposition and pointing out to Albertans the changes this government is choosing to try to make because they do not have the courage themselves to come out and say it. If that means that I'm

required to do my job and to come to this place over the course of 48 hours or 72 hours or how many hours that will be, I will continue to represent my constituents and point out that this government, as we are pointing out through this amendment, is making changes by the introduction of this amended Education Act that reduce the protections that are in place for students that want to form a GSA.

To say that this makes no changes is not unlike, Mr. Chair, listing out a set of steps that is contained nowhere in this legislation, that is currently present nowhere in regulation, that this government has given no indication it actually intends to give any force of law, any teeth whatsoever. They can stand up and read that list as many times as they want, but if they are unwilling to put any teeth behind it, then they do not believe in it.

So I will continue to stand and debate this amendment and bring forward changes that would actually put some teeth in this law. Unlike members that have gotten up in this House and taken great personal offence that we would suggest that anybody in this province would ever have anything but the best of motives in any action they would ever take, Mr. Chair, I recognize that a majority of, say, employers or parents, indeed most principals, most administration have the best interests of those that they are there to serve. But the fact is that there is still a minority of people who do not – and we know that that is demonstrable – because people file employment standards complaints. Students have come to us and told of the obstacles that they face. We do not legislate for the best of people; we legislate for the people that we know are going to try to skirt the law.

We are not here today to debate the fact that the majority of teachers or principals or indeed schools will not place obstacles in the path of the students. We are here to debate the fact that we know that there is a minority that did. That is not fearmongering, Mr. Chair. If I get passionate on that point, it's because I am concerned for these youth, the stories that I hear directly from my constituents, who have sent me here to this place, who continue to send me e-mails and direct messages and Facebook direct messages of support, thanking me for continuing to stand and rise in this place. The shame lies with this Government House Leader in suggesting that I have any other motive in being here than to represent my constituents and to argue for the values they represent, that they sent me here to represent, and that I personally believe in. I will continue to do that.

**8:50 a.m.**

There is no argument. You cannot argue that once this legislation passes, there will be less protection for LGBTQ2S-plus youth who want to form a GSA or a QSA in their school. There will be less of a guarantee that the school they attend will have a safe and caring schools policy. Again, the steps that this government is so fond of standing and reading in this House are nowhere enforced. They have no force in law or regulation. If this government truly believes that that should be the case and that those steps should be followed and that there should be no attempt to subvert them, then why are they not in the legislation? Will they stand in this House and promise that they will put those steps in regulation, that they will outline precisely what is expected in each circumstance? We owe these young people nothing less.

I will stand here and I will praise those schools that step up, absolutely. I will recognize the many institutions within our province that have supported LGBTQ2S-plus youth. But I will also continue to note those that have not and indeed that it has been the track record of Conservative governments in this province that they would prefer to cater to those few that put their own personal sense of moral value above the safety of LGBTQ2S-plus youth, above the right of those youth to express themselves for who they are, to love

who they love, to be who they are. That is why we are here, and that is why we are having this debate. It is an insult that any member of this government would stand and suggest otherwise.

This amendment is appropriate. It is clear that this government provides absolutely no timeline. They refuse to allow the word “immediately.” They suggest that somehow that is unattainable although the vast majority of our educational institutions have had no problem with that. What’s the difficulty, Mr. Chair? A student comes and says, “I would like to form a GSA in my school.” “No problem. Request granted.” That’s immediately. That’s not a difficult thing. But if they feel that, no, they need some time to work that out and to assign the room where it’s going to take place and to ensure the teacher’s schedule, I think two weeks is a pretty reasonable length of time to allow that to happen.

As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar noted last night, even some of the smallest schools in our province are able to provide some incredible opportunities for students, with limited resources. I think that within two weeks it is entirely possible for any school in this province to be able to find a space within a school, to be able to put a staff member in place who would be able to support those students, and to allow them a student-led group, where the students themselves are choosing what they are going to study, where the students themselves choose what they are going to discuss, to allow that to take place.

They suggest that we are fearmongering, Mr. Chair, when I heard members of this government fearmonger about what a GSA was when we brought in Bill 24, trying to suggest that it was a backdoor way for the government to provide sexual education that otherwise would not have been allowed, to suggest that they were some sort of ideological sex club. That is fearmongering, and it is on the record.

We are not fearmongering to stand and point out the track record of Conservative governments and what, indeed, members of this government and others within this province and those who have demonstrated they have some influence within this party have said and have done and to point out that this legislation, in fact, does remove clear provisions, that when and if this government chooses to pass this legislation, there will be less protection for LGBTQ2S students in this province.

Does that mean that GSAs will cease to exist? No. Thankfully, I’ve heard from many teachers who say that they will continue to defend their students and stand up for them regardless of what this government legislates. But it does mean that for some vulnerable students in this province in some educational institutions there very well may not be a GSA where there could have been one, because this government is carving out that loophole. They’re intentionally providing that opportunity to obstruct, and that is why we bring forward this amendment, because if this government’s intention is what it says it is, this helps them achieve the goal that they claim they have.

We are, respectfully, here as opposition offering them the opportunity to make this legislation better. If their intent is what they say it is, they can step up and they can make sure that no student in this province will be left vulnerable. But that does not seem to be the case. If they are not willing to support this amendment, I can only assume that they want to leave that door open.

We are not fearmongering by pointing that out, Mr. Chair. We are stating a fact that we have heard from the LGBTQ2S-plus community. We are not stoking fear; we are reflecting the genuine fear we hear from them. I am reflecting the voice and the discomfort that many from that community – youth, adults – have expressed to me about the steps this government is choosing to take. This government has the opportunity to remove that fear. If this

government wants to build goodwill with that community, they can accept something like this simple amendment, which demonstrates their intention. So far this government has chosen not to do so. That is not fearmongering. That is fact.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

They can choose to interpret their actions however they like, but I can tell you how those I speak to in the LGBTQ2S-plus community see it, how those who were here at the rally at the Legislature saw it, how those who were at the Stonewall 50th anniversary march see it. This government can stand here and try to tell the community what they should feel or what they should believe about their actions, or this government can look at the facts of the legislation that they are bringing forward and the actual changes they are introducing. They can look at this amendment, which we are bringing forward in our job as the Official Opposition, as a united caucus who continue to come to this place and stand together to represent the values that we are all here to represent under the banner of our leader, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

One can only assume that the Government House Leader must greatly fear her for all the time he needs to spend talking about her. But I can tell you this. Our caucus is proud to stand in this place. We are proud to continue to bring forward amendments to make this bill better. We are proud to try to help this government live up to the ambitions it claims to have. We are here to try to help this government demonstrate to the LGBTQ2S-plus community that its words are not hollow, that the few members that choose to show up at pride events are not there simply to check a box. We’re giving them the opportunity to show through action as well as words that they support all LGBTQ2S-plus youth, regardless of what school they attend, by providing an actual provision and actual timeline to back up the lovely steps that they like to stand and read in this House but which they provide no actual teeth to implement, to actually demonstrate that they will stand up against those who are known to be bad actors in this circumstance, much as we stand up to and we legislate for bad actors in employment. That in no way impugns all employers, but it recognizes the reality that they exist. That is not fearmongering, Madam Chair. That is realism. That is pragmatism. That is the world we live in.

9:00 a.m.

That is why we’ve brought forward this basic amendment, simply stating that within two weeks of a request by a student they would be granted the ability to form a GSA or QSA, something every member in this House has stood and said that they believe they should absolutely have the right to do. We are giving this government the opportunity to actually put it in the legislation, in their regulation, in a place where it can actually be enforced, that this must be allowed.

This government can choose to vote this amendment down and, in so doing, indicate that they feel it’s not necessary to actually require anybody to do this. They can choose to simply say . . .

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, thanks, Madam Chair. You know what? The hon. member just talked about being pragmatic. I agree with the hon. member, and I would politely, I hope, suggest that the opposition be pragmatic. Let me explain what I mean by that. As our hon. Government House Leader has pointed out, we’re troubled by the fact that the NDP has tried to convince LGBTQ youth that we’re against them. Nothing could be further from the truth, and I

would like to say that today. In terms of being pragmatic, the hon. government Education Minister has said that we're going to protect them, and we've got strong legislation in place. The hon. Government House Leader has said that we will protect LGBTQ youth. Our government is saying that.

In terms of being pragmatic, sure, the opposition can vote against us on our legislation. We're on the record that we're going to support GSAs, QSAs, and whatever other groups the kids want to call it, and if we don't, they're in the wonderful position of being across the aisle to hold us accountable. My suggestion is that they do what the previous member just said and get pragmatic about that and hold us accountable for what we promised.

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5?

**Some Hon. Members:** Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:04 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

|        |          |               |
|--------|----------|---------------|
| Bilous | Hoffman  | Renaud        |
| Dach   | Irwin    | Shepherd      |
| Dang   | Pancholi | Sigurdson, L. |

**9:20 a.m.**

Against the motion:

|                    |               |                 |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer              | Lovely        | Rowswell        |
| Amery              | Luan          | Rutherford      |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Madu          | Schow           |
| Dreeshen           | McIver        | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Getson             | Neudorf       | Singh           |
| Glasgo             | Nixon, Jeremy | Smith           |
| Goodridge          | Orr           | Toor            |
| Hanson             | Rehn          | Walker          |
| Horner             | Rosin         | Yao             |
| Hunter             |               |                 |

|         |         |              |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 9 | Against – 28 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

**The Chair:** We are back on the main bill, Bill 8. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll cut straight to the chase. I have another amendment that I'm happy to provide.

**The Chair:** This will be known as amendment A6.

Hon. member, please proceed.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll read the amendment into the record and then continue with my rationale. Section 10 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

10 Section 33 is amended

- (a) in subsection (1)(e) by striking out "specialized";
- (b) by adding the following after subsection (2):
  - (2.1) 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 not contain provisions that conflict with or are inconsistent with this section or section 35.1, and in particular must not contain provisions that would
  - (i) undermine the promotion of a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging,
  - (ii) require a principal to obtain the approval of the superintendent or board or to follow other administrative processes before carrying out functions under section 35.1, or
  - (iii) permit a principal to prohibit any of the names for a voluntary student organization identified under section 35.1(3),
- (b) must include the text of section 35.1(1), (3) and (4),
- and
- (c) must set out the name of the legislation that governs the disclosure of personal information by the board.

I'm trying to package it all here together in one nice amendment, the issues that we have with reverting to Bill 8 when it comes to GSAs. This is an opportunity for the government, if indeed they want to maintain the way things are today, to simply do it by passing this amendment.

Some of the rationale. Of course, one, we are moving backwards, if we pass the bill in its current form, on giving the assurance that students will not be outed without their consent, that they have the ability to choose to whom and how they come out.

Two, it is making sure that it is acted on in a timely fashion, making sure that there can't be more administrative barriers to students wishing to form GSAs. The reason why we brought forward Bill 24 in the first place was to address those experiences that students had told us they were living and experiencing.

It is requiring school board policies to include the ability for students – indeed, from what the Government House Leader said is the practice, it will become actual law through this amendment that students be able to name the groups names that they choose.

It is requiring that school boards include parts of the Education Act in reference to privacy laws in their policies to make sure school boards document clearly and communicate the rights to students who choose to form these groups.

I can't help but reflect on a Facebook video that resurfaced. It was a Facebook video that was made during the Education minister's seeking of the nomination in Red Deer to be the candidate. There was a forum in which the candidates seeking nomination were asked about their positions around LGBTQ issues for youth, and the minister talked about both Bill 10 and Bill 24. Bill 10, you'll recall, was passed during the Prentice period and Bill 24, of course, during the period under the leadership of our party and our then Premier, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The now Education minister said that it was unneeded, that they were flawed policies based on flawed reasoning because safe and caring schools policies are sufficient and that there was no need to go further. She said that going further through these bills, particularly Bill 24, was done to further an agenda.

To reiterate, there is absolutely a need. Just as a statistic from a government of Alberta survey that was done recently, 53 per cent of self-identified LGBTQ students – those are sexual orientation

minorities and gender identity minorities – feel unsafe in school. We have rules in this place governing our conduct and our behaviour to ensure all of us feel safe in doing our jobs and have the ability to speak up and represent our constituents without concerns of intimidation or harassment or bullying. I think that if 53 per cent of the members in this place felt unsafe, we would do something about it to change that condition. I would expect that we would, and I would support that. That is a difference where 3 per cent of identified heterosexual students say that they feel unsafe. At 53 versus 3, significantly more needs to be done.

Of course, the statistics around homelessness: while the percentage of youth overall who identify as LGBTQ is small, nearly half of homeless youth in this province identify as being LGBTQ.

The safe and caring schools policies are insufficient. They don't do the job. That clearly is the motivation behind this bill coming in. Most of the things that we did when we were in government, for example bringing in pay bands for superintendents, bringing in teaching quality standards and leadership quality standards: those pieces have been carried over. Bringing in the cap on what parents can be charged for school fees: that's being carried over. If the Premier says, "Well, we said that we were going to proclaim Bill 8," the Premier is planning on doing that through this amendment act with a number of the changes that we brought in when we were in government, and we think that that's a good thing. He saw a number of things that we did, and he said, "You know, we should carry those over," but he or the Education minister, or both, intentionally are not carrying over the pieces from Bill 24.

Why is that, and why is it that the government continues to say that even if this bill passes, they will be the strongest protections in Canada? Clearly, they won't be. We've mapped out the facts on other jurisdictions – B.C., Atlantic Canada – and, clearly, they have stronger protections. They have stronger protections. They have stronger ways of protecting youth.

Also, of course, there's the School Act, that is the current piece of legislation that is in place, and it is much stronger than what's being proposed under Bill 8. I'm sure my colleagues will very happily flesh that out. [interjections]

**The Chair:** Sorry. Hon. members, there's a conversation happening between the aisles. While our speaker is up, I will ask that we give our speaker the floor.

Hon. member, please proceed.

**Ms Hoffman:** I'm reminded that downstairs, when you walk up the stairs from the lower level to the second floor, there is a bulletin board on the left, and it talks about fake news. It talks about how you identify what's fake in the news. This is something that kids have been talking about for a few years at least. When I go visit their classrooms, they say, you know, "What is fake news, and why is it that there are sometimes people saying one thing and other people saying the other thing?" I say, "Well, because sometimes people will read something, they won't like what it says, and they want to push a different message." I do call on all of us to read what's in black and white.

Our School Act is far more protecting for youth than what's being proposed by the government. They can espouse all sorts of talking points, they can say things that simply are fake news, and it's up to us as individuals – all of us ended up in this place because we sought a nomination, we put our name on a ballot, and people voted for us. They expect us to do our work. They expect us to read the bills. They expect us to make sure that when we stand in this place and speak, we are telling the truth. It is upon all of us, when we go home to our constituents and people say, "So, why did you vote for that?" to be able to have the confidence and conviction to say, "I did it

because I felt it was right, I did it because I did my homework, I did it because I listened to the arguments, and I made the decision that I believed was right." I can tell you that if you go home and you say, "I did what I was told to do," that's not going to pass, right?

9:30 a.m.

People didn't elect us to do what somebody else told us to do; they elected us to do our job, to come into this place and make sure, when we pass laws, that those laws are based on truth, that those laws are based on fact. The truth is that 53 per cent of LGBTQ youth in Alberta, according to the government of Alberta survey, feel unsafe. The truth is that research shows that in schools that have GSAs, the overall sense of satisfaction and belonging and sense of safety goes up for the overall population, significantly for LGBTQ youth, but it goes up for the overall population.

The truth is that we have more to do on high school completion rates. We absolutely invest in our youth and in them having the opportunity to succeed because we want them to achieve what they seek to achieve. We want them to achieve their full potential. When 53 per cent of one demographic of students feel unsafe at school, what's the likelihood that they're going to continue to go to school? What's the likelihood that they're going to achieve their highest level of potential? It's unlikely. This is the truth, and these are some of the facts.

I want to say one more thing before I cede the floor for comments from my colleagues. People stand in this House and talk about the risks, and we will hear in this place many times that one death is one death too many. We will hear that many times in this place, and they are right. Anything that can be done to save a life must be done. This is being designed to save the lives of many, and by failing to act on these protections that students told us needed to be acted on – students told us that they needed to have immediacy, that they needed to have privacy protection. They needed to ensure that they couldn't be pushed out of calling the group what they wanted it to be called. They needed that in law.

If this passes in its current form, without the amendments that we're proposing, we will be moving backwards. Read the legislation. Read the School Act today. Read the proposed Education Act. They are two very different pieces of legislation with different intended outcomes.

Now, the candidate seeking the candidacy at that time said that there were unintended consequences, that there ended up being court action. Well, the court action has been settled. The law was in place, was done in a way that the courts upheld it. I can tell you that there will be court action if it gets overturned. There absolutely will be.

Court action isn't my gravest concern. The sense of students feeling unsafe and unwelcome is my gravest concern. The sense that students will turn back to situations that are unsafe for them and for each other is my gravest concern, and the message that this sends to a whole demographic, including teachers in our schools today who are LGBTQ, is my grave concern.

We have an opportunity to fix this flawed legislation. This is flawed legislation, and it is done in a way that I would say is vindictive and cruel. But we have an opportunity as members, whose names will stand in *Hansard*, to stay on the right side of history on this one and to do what we know is right, not what we were told to do, because this is something that has grave and lasting consequences if we fail to get it right. Society is moving forward, including the people who voted for us across this province. I don't think that many would say that their number one hope for government is that they create the sense of increased unsafe environments for students who are sexual orientation minorities or gender identity minorities.

Again, many people spoke to the motion the other night on free votes and conscience votes. I would say that free speech is something that, I guess, maybe should have been amended into that motion itself because I know that a couple of nights ago when the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge wanted to rise, it was very clear in this House that that member was denied that ability by that member's own colleagues. It seems like votes on conscience issues – again, I know that there are people in this House who care deeply about people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning, queer, allied, two-spirited, and the list goes on. I know there are people in this place, not just in our caucus, who know somebody who is a sexual orientation or gender identity minority. I know there are. I don't think the message they want to send is one of self-harm or disrespect or: "Go ahead. Work your way, jump your way through all the hoops, and at the end of the day, after you've jumped your way through all the hoops, if things aren't as good as they were under the NDP, then go ahead and go back to the NDP." You know, sure, electorally four years from now that might be helpful, but my grave concern is about these youth and about these staff at schools for the next four years.

It wasn't every day I walked the halls of schools and had students come over to me and say: hey, thanks for that policy. I remember there was one that I supported around reducing junk food in schools. I can tell you that I walked the halls of schools, and not many kids came over and said: thanks for that; thanks for giving us less junk food. But I can tell you that almost every high school I went to after we passed our safe, caring, inclusive LGBTQ policies had at least one kid come up to me and say thank you. The kids that came up didn't always identify to me as being students that were gay or lesbian. Often they'd say: I have a friend that that policy really helped. That's powerful.

Students might not come up to you when they see you in your riding and say, "What you did really hurt me," but what we are doing through this is actually furthering the shame and stigma against sexual orientation minorities and gender identity minorities. The likelihood that they'll come up and say, "What you did really hurt me" or "What you did really hurt my friend" is being diminished by failing to honour those voices, failing to honour the progress that we've made as a society. This isn't something that was done to hurt anyone. The parent and teacher whose letter I read earlier says very clearly that they feel that their parental rights have been well respected. This is about making sure that there's a safe place at school for all kids as, of course, it's inclusive. It's a GSA for all kids to come and feel loved and respected and supported and to help grow that love in their schools and their communities.

This amendment is done in a way that we can make sure that they keep the title that they choose, that they keep the confidentiality, and that they are done in a timely fashion. It's simple. A law without consequences, a law without times, a law without a timeline that it must be acted upon is no law at all. The question that remains to me and to many Albertans who've contacted me is: how can the government continue to say that these will be the strongest protections in Canada when that simply isn't true? It simply isn't true. There are stronger protections in B.C. and Ontario and Atlantic Canada and far stronger protections in Alberta today, far stronger protections. So how can the government continue to say things that don't align with reality, the black and white that's on the paper? That's what they keep saying. I think that they are right to ask. I think they are right to demand that Alberta continue to be a place where students feel respected and included as well as parents and allies.

One more quick anecdote I'll mention. I read a story the other night. There was another story that I thought about. It started a lot of this discussion across North America. It was about two penguins

at the zoo that decided to raise a penguin egg, a penguin hatchling, together. This book was banned in many, many schools and libraries because the two penguins – it was based on reality; I think it was a New York zoo – were of the same sex.

**Member Irwin:** Gay penguins.

**Ms Hoffman:** The gay penguins. They weren't loving each other. Well, I guess they were. They formed a family, and they loved that little penguin egg. This caused so much controversy, talking about love between three penguins, a baby penguin and two adult penguins. This is what we should be talking about more, about love more than about division. This is why it's so important that we create opportunities for students to feel safe in their schools.

One other thing I do want to mention is the disbanding of the conversion therapy working group because I think that it feeds into why this amendment is so needed. For a government that said during the campaign that what was being said about the history of the Premier and the party wasn't founded in reality and that those things wouldn't be governed on or those things wouldn't be acted on, they're doing exactly the opposite just a few short weeks after the election by disbanding the conversion therapy working group, one that had experts from a variety of perspectives and parts of the province, people with lived experience, religious leaders, academics, medical experts, and legal experts working together to find ways to end this harmful practice. The government threw up their hands and said: "Nothing to see here. We're just going to disband it. We're going to ignore all of that expert advice, and we're going to ignore the reality that conversion therapy causes real and damaging harm." Strike one.

Strike two: this is very damaging legislation that is attacking the progress that's been made in protecting vulnerable students over the last four years. I sure hope there isn't a third strike, not for the government's sake but for Alberta's sake.

**9:40 a.m.**

My goal is to see Alberta flourish. My goal is to see us continue to move forward and find ways to help all succeed. I fear that that is not the goal of everyone, that the divide between the haves and the have-nots economically and the divide between minorities and nonminorities is growing in this province. I believe that that is an injustice. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre talked about how laws aren't set up for the majority, that laws are set up to protect the minority. I'd say that's true. I'd say that the majority of people would probably drive at a reasonable speed on the highway, whether there were signs up or not, but for the safety of all we must put up speed limits because if one person drives beyond erratically, it endangers others. You might think with this bill that by taking away these protections . . .

**The Chair:** Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A6? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I've spoken multiple times in this House to Bill 8, Bill Hate, Bill Straight. I'm happy to rise to this amendment, and I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for introducing it. I've shared my own stories as a queer person, my own struggle with coming out, struggling with my own mental health, and with being a teacher in rural Alberta and seeing first-hand the struggle of students as well. I've shared the stories of others, including teachers, students, parents. I noted yesterday or whenever it was – time has become a bit of a confusing thing these days – that while this discussion, this debate hasn't always been easy as it is something that's so personal to me,

one of the very powerful things that has come out of this debate is that I've had so many people reach out to me, praising me, praising our team for our hard work, thanking us for being their voice and urging us to not stop fighting even though the government will say that this is a distraction.

For the Government House Leader to stand up earlier and say that we're not fighting for Albertans, a direct quote, and that we're spreading fear within the community is absurd. My Alberta includes the LGBTQ2S community. My colleagues and I are not going to stop fighting for them and for every Albertan. I believe I may be the only one from the LGBTQ community in this House, and I can tell you that this issue is a big deal. People care. Many people care.

As I said, I'm hearing from parents, teachers, and students, queer and straight. They're worried, and they're fearful. To try to invalidate these fears is shameful, and it proves exactly why this discussion, why this debate is needed. It proves why immediate access to GSAs for our vulnerable students is needed. As I've said many times in this House, GSAs are not just for students; they support teachers, staff, allies. They lift up the entire school community. This is why this amendment is so important as well. It provides additional clarity for schools, for boards, for teachers, and most importantly for students because they are the ones that are most affected: queer students, those who are seeking GSAs, but also, as I said, their straight allies as well.

I really want to take a few moments this morning to share the story of another young person. This is someone who asked me to share their story, and I think their story highlights exactly why this amendment is needed. I ask you to listen to their words. These are real words – these are true – and sometimes they are hard to hear. They've given me permission to share their name, and they may even be watching.

My name is Dillon Cosgrove. I am writing to oppose Bill 8. I attended Holyrood Elementary School from 1994 to 2001.

There was no GSA at the school or the corresponding after school care program at the time I was enrolled. I was popular and had a lot of longtime friends until the fourth grade. At this point when other girls were crushing on boys, I was pretty unphased by the idea of boys and [I] felt like I fit in with them more than . . . other girls my age. I cut my hair short and rocked the fashionable phenomenon of zip-away pants and Oilers T shirts but [I] continued to have sleepovers with the girls I had made friends with over the course of elementary. At [some] point, some vicious rumours started about my sexuality (They were true). I say vicious not because the title of lesbian is negative, but because it was used as a weapon and a tool to keep me quiet for not sticking with traditional gender roles or expectations. Unfortunately, I didn't have the words to describe my feelings at this point which is why it was so harmful. The kids at school called me a dyke, accused me of being sexual with other girls my age and spread other rumours about how I was gross and should be avoided. Before I even knew what the word lesbian or dyke truly meant, I was being ostracized because of it and my interpretation of my identity was negative. As a nine-year-old, the word to describe a part of who I was, was used against me violently and unfairly before I knew what it meant and before the kids who were calling me those words truly knew what they meant and the effect it could have on a child. All of these rumours culminated about a year and a half later when I was goofing around with a female friend of mine platonically and innocently play-fighting. After class, some of my bullies had witnessed me playing and had started a chain of paper notes about my lesbianism and how overtly I was showcasing it. I had hardly any friends and I was fed up with being bullied so I went to my Vice-Principal for help. I had explained the situation and the bullying that had been going on for months that had caused me to stay

home pretending to be sick because I didn't want to face going to school to be ridiculed. My Vice Principals advice was to stop acting like a lesbian if I didn't want to be called one. I got detention in a room alone with my bullies during lunch time and had to bring [a note home] to my Mom explaining why I got detention. My Vice-Principal wrote home a note that outed [for] me the rumours that were being said and my Mom brushed off the remarks as just things that bullies say. She said that one of my male friends had told his Mom that he didn't believe the remarks about me to be true and that was enough for my Mom to believe it wasn't as well. I found this completely disheartening. If one of my best friends couldn't believe that it was true, and everyone thought it was [an] awful thing I would push [away] any signs of being gay . . . because I couldn't believe that I was something that people so openly hated. I grew my hair out, I started to wear dresses again, I was miserable.

If my peers and I had access to a gay-straight alliance I would have had the positive language to describe who I was becoming and the feelings that I got other than the negative language that my peers were regurgitating [from] the limited education they had about sexual and gender identity. I would have had a safe place to go when even my Vice-Principal didn't have a healthy way to react to the situation and I would have felt more secure about who I was [as I entered] into Junior High and High School.

During Junior High and High School I suffered from major bouts of depression including self-harm and suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts. I had such a negative view of myself that had been developed through years of self-hatred and hatred by my classmates. I came out to my Mom when I was 12. I came out 5 more times to her before she stopped telling me my homosexuality was a phase. I would like to believe my mom would have let me become a part of a Gay-Straight Alliance [had I] asked for her permission, but a part of me knows she would have thought it would encourage my homosexuality with the mindset that it was a choice. I found communities where I could be myself during this time in theatre, or on sports teams (where the opposing team sometimes thought I was a boy and I really liked that). I continued to try to have relationships with men and boys into my 20s thinking that what my Mom had said was true, that being Gay was a phase and that I just hadn't found the right person yet. It wasn't until university when I started to attend Women and Gender Studies Classes that I was able to start processing my internalized homophobia. I lived separate lives often, dating men and introducing them to my family, but living a secret life as a gay woman. I was hurt and was trying to find resilience on a foundation of self-hatred. Hurt people, hurt people, and the relationships I tried to maintain during that time were rocky, full of secrets and fear. I was scared of people finding out who I truly was. I was scared of cutting my hair short and looking more masculine. I was scared of living outside of the gender binary, because in the 90's no one was out and I had no role models to tell me that who I am is okay. That I had value. When I was 25 about 13 years after the first time I came out to my Mom, I came out again for the last time. I told her that it had been 13 years, and I could positively say that loving women wasn't a phase. I cut my hair again when I was 28 and I still get bullied by people on the street, in bars and in my workplace especially [after our Premier] was elected and hatred toward homosexuals seems rampant. However, It's different [now]. Now, I have positive influences in the media and in my classrooms.

They mention myself, Jason Garcia, and Randi Nixon.

**9:50 a.m.**

I have my own Gay-Straight alliance [with] my friends and [my] chosen family and with that support, I have been able to express my identity as a compassionate, music-loving, Gender Non-Binary Queer. Without the support of understanding and

accepting people in my life I may still be closeted and full of self-loathing. I fiercely believe that without . . . GSAs in schools lives are in danger. My life was in danger because of their absence, and I wish for and will fight for the children and youth of Alberta so that it won't be the same for them.

Adamantly,  
Dillon Cosgrove

As I said, I thank Dillon so much for sharing that, and I told them – they use the pronouns “they/them” – that their story meant a lot to me. I shared with them as well that, you know, we’ve talked countless times in this House about the struggles. We’ve shared the stories and the struggles of young people and their issues with mental health. We’ve shared the statistics. We’ve shared the evidence. We haven’t just shared the lived experiences of young people; we’ve shared the evidence. We’ve shared the academic literature. We’ve shared the statistics. I don’t want people like Dillon to just become another statistic. We’re not being hyperbolic over here. We’re not. I’ve truly heard from countless people. I can’t stay on top of the messages that I’m receiving.

To echo the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, I want to again urge the members opposite to think about folks like Dillon as they’re mulling over this amendment, to think about the fact that you’ve been encouraged to vote according to your conscience. You’re also here to vote according to your constituents, and I don’t think any of your constituents sent you here to jeopardize vulnerable youth in our province.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Wow. How can I follow that up? That was simply amazing. I hope members of the government were listening. It’s something that I think was very important. It was a story that was extremely moving for myself and I know for many members here in the opposition. I hope it’s something that we can get through to the government, how important these provisions and this amendment that we are trying to bring in protections for are for young people across this province.

Madam Chair, I want to give the government a chance here. We have an amendment that brings in a number of very important clauses. It requires principals to permit the names to be whatever the students want. It requires them to have safe and respected places. It requires them to grant the approval in a timely manner. I think that all of these things are simple. They’re clear. They ensure that we have the best protections. They’re actually what members of the Conservative Party voted for in the 29th Legislature for a large part, so I think that this is the opportunity for the government to do the right thing. It’s the opportunity for the government to listen to Albertans, to listen to young people, and to understand how important this is for vulnerable Albertans and LGBTQ2S-plus youth. Whether they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, whatever it is, it’s important that their voices are heard here in this Assembly. It’s important that their voices are understood here in this Assembly and that this amendment is understood.

When we understand the implications of what Bill Hate does, we understand how important these amendments are. We understand how important this amendment is because it moves forward to move these welcoming, caring, inclusive, and respectful spaces for GSAs and QSAs, Madam Chair. This is the opportunity. The government can act now and do the right thing. They can act now and listen to gay students. They can act now and listen to queer students. We know that the voices of those gay and queer students are the ones that matter the most. We know that they came in the hundreds just two weeks ago here on the steps of this Legislature –

and they did it as well in Calgary – to tell this government that these provisions are important, that these protections are important, that Bill Hate attacks them. That’s what they told this government, Madam Chair.

It’s something that I think is very important that we recognize here in this Assembly. We’ve heard stories over and over again from many different perspectives here from the opposition. The government: unfortunately, it sounds like we haven’t heard any stories around their experiences either with the LGBTQ2S-plus community or, in fact, whether they’ve met with any members of the LGBTQ2S community at all. In fact, we haven’t even heard whether any of the ministers or government members have ever even attended a GSA or been a part of a GSA or spoken to students in GSAs.

In this Assembly I think it’s important that when we talk about protecting these voices and protecting these young people, we recognize that they showed up in the hundreds and told us the provisions in Bill Hate were not good enough. They told us that we need changes, and these amendments right here in front of us are those changes that would make this bill better. They would help improve those protections for gay kids. They would help improve those protections for the hundreds of Albertans and the young students who stood out on these steps to tell the government to leave the kids alone, to tell the Premier to leave the kids alone, because those kids understand how important having a safe space in their school is.

Madam Chair, this is their chance. This is their chance to prove that they’re listening to the voices of young Albertans, that they’re listening to the voices of the LGBTQ2S-plus community, that they’re listening to those perspectives. I really do think that the government has the right intention here, but they must do the actual actions. The government must actually go forward and protect those kids, and this amendment would do that. This amendment would have those voices represented here in this Legislature and would allow us to have strong protections for all students. That is something that I think all members of the Assembly will strive for.

I really do hope that we can hear from members of the government on, maybe, some of the experiences they had with GSAs and QSAs and whether they’ve spoken to any people in GSAs or QSAs because, Madam Chair, I was a member of a GSA when I was in high school. In fact, just a few weeks ago I spoke to hundreds of people who were in the LGBTQ2S community right here on the steps of this Legislature. It’s unfortunate that none of the members of the government caucus or government front bench were able to attend, but that is the reality of who we heard from and what they want to be brought in to protect these students.

Really, I urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment. I think it’s the right thing to do. This is the opportunity. We have a bundle of amendments here that will bring in the protections that are so desperately needed for our students. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6? The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to – and maybe the member can clarify what he meant by “gay, lesbian . . . [or] whatever it is.” Maybe you could clarify “whatever it is” to the rest of us, an absolute disrespect that that sentence meant to the community. I think that maybe you might want to clarify and maybe spell out for us what “whatever it is” means.

**Some Hon. Members:** Through the chair, please.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Madam Chair, sorry. Through you, I think it may be imperative for that member to explain to the rest of the Chamber the statement: “whatever [that] is”. That doesn’t even refer to a person, as far as I understand. As a person, I’m quite offended by that comment and I believe at some point that member needs to stand up and apologize to the LGBTQ2S community, first of all.

Second of all, just to be clear, when we talk about having the strongest legislation that is because – and if I’m wrong, please correct me; I would be thrilled to be corrected – Alberta is the only province that has enacted law around GSAs, the only province in the country. We are the only ones that have legislated laws for protections for LGBTQ2S-plus youth in schools for GSAs. Newfoundland and Labrador have policies, but no enacted legislation. B.C., at one point in time, Madam Chair, was ahead of the curve. They have no enacted legislation. In fact, they haven’t passed any laws. They have codes of conduct. We are way ahead of the curve, and we’re ahead of Ontario, as well. Our legislations are enacted, have stronger protections.

We have made it absolutely imperative that there is no mandatory, absolutely no mandatory, telling of when a child is in a GSA. More importantly, we have made sure that those GSAs are required in schools and if a child asks for one, they get one. On top of that, Madam Chair, the Education Act, as soon as it is passed, the legislation that we have right now will be the legislation that is there. We are the only province in Canada that has enacted laws to protect LGBTQ2S-plus students, not “whatever it is,” not “whatever it is,” not “whatever it is,” Madam Chair, in this country.

**10:00 a.m.**

Now, as the Member for Calgary-Hays said earlier, we have an opportunity here as a government to be held accountable for this, and the duty of the opposition and anybody else will be to hold us accountable for that legislation. We are thrilled to be able to enact legislation that protects these beautiful human beings. Actually, to the point of the member that was talking about the stories of some of the children that have written to her, I’ve also stood up in this House with stories, stories about absolutely incredible, courageous – courageous – young people from the LGBTQ2S-plus community who have come forward with their stories, who have impacted all of us at a very deep and very, very profound level. In fact, some of the stories I told were highly personal.

You know what was interesting was that the attacks from the left for those stories were so profound that my son was personally attacked for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks on end after coming forward with a story about his friend who he helped in a GSA when he was in school. It was fine with the NDP that that happened. It was fine that they attacked my son for eight weeks straight on Twitter, nonstop, questioning not only who he is but his sexuality – their friends. For people who supposedly don’t want to out kids, my son became a target because he chose to come forward with a very compelling story about how important GSAs are.

For those who asked the questions about whether or not we’ve been part of GSAs, maybe you’re not listening. The member sitting right beside you has put out a very, very compelling statement. Not only that, our House leader, who has worked directly with folks that are heavily impacted in this scenario and who have ended up in the worst possible situations; these two brothers have stood up every single day of their lives, Madam Chair, to help people in vulnerable situations to come and find their space to be who they are, to be champions – champions – for these incredible human beings who are so courageous, who have fought for their rights, for their human rights that are outlined in the Alberta human rights declaration.

So to even put forward the notion that anybody on this side would not care for any person who finds themselves in a vulnerable situation – again, if the opposition members want to continue to attack Albertans, that is what Albertans will see. If they want to build bridges and build capacity so that love is the very first word that comes when we talk about any child, no matter what their background, who they love, their gender diversity, who they are as a human being, then let’s talk about that. If somehow the legislation that we bring forward isn’t enough, they’re going to have the opportunity to tell us that. But Bill 10 was a fundamentally humungous change and shift in how it is that we recognize a very special minority group in this province, a group that contributes massively to the fabric, massively to the diversity of this province with love and compassion and understanding, who fought for human rights. None of us on this side disputes that for one millisecond. The question is: who legislates and who doesn’t? Alberta legislates. We have created law. We are protecting our youth. We will continue to protect our youth.

You know what? The NDP and their friends, you can attack me every day that you want. My son, just to say, you know what? He came through that. You know what he did? He went further. He went further, and he made sure he was out there with his friends from whatever background it was – not “whatever it is” – whatever background that these folks came from, however old, wherever he could help in order to make sure that he was available to any person who might need him no matter what the problem, no matter what they did to him, no matter how much they threw him under the bus, no matter what they said about him on Twitter. He stood up against that. My baby – my baby – stood up against that nonsense at the tender age of 18, having his sexuality questioned by those people, who supposedly want to protect children.

**Mr. Bilous:** Point of order, Madam Chair.

**Point of Order  
Imputing Motives  
False Allegations**

**Mr. Bilous:** Section 23(h), (i), (j). The member is clearly trying to impute false motives, incite disorder in this House by making accusations that our . . . [interjections]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, I cannot hear who’s speaking. Please proceed.

**Mr. Bilous:** . . . making accusations that we . . . [interjection]

**The Chair:** Hon. member, Edmonton-City Centre, the Opposition House Leader has the floor.

**Mr. Bilous:** Please.

. . . by making accusations, in her words, that “those people did this to my son.” That is a false statement made to cause disorder and imputing false motives. Members on this side of the House did not attack her son, which is what she is insinuating, implying [interjection]. Thank you very much. So, Madam Chair, I would appreciate it if the member withdrew those comments, accusing those people, us on this side of the House, of committing acts which we did not.

**Mrs. Aheer:** When I say those people, I mean people that support the former government, all of whom on that side never once stood up for my child, knowing full well what was going on on Twitter. Not one statement came from the government to protect my child. If there was one and I missed it, I will happily pull back that

statement, but I know for a fact that statements were supported, retweeted by people that were in the government, on that side. I will happily, happily take back that statement any day, but until I receive an apology from the former NDP government on the attacks that happened on my own child for standing up to make sure that protections were here for children in GSAs and stood his ground at the tender age of 18 while a government on this side allowed that to happen – I will happily take back my remarks, Madam Chair, if there is some form or way that that can happen for my son. But in the meantime, while I know that this happened under the government that was previously here, the NDP government, I find it very, very difficult to pull back my comments.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, while realizing this is a sensitive area, I think, for all members in this House, a number of differences of opinion, a number of emotions, I think it is important that we most certainly speak through the chair. In broad terms “those” or “them” or “they” have been used in various circumstances against various sides of this House, but I would caution that the speakers please speak through the chair, make this less personal.

Hon. minister, please proceed.

### Debate Continued

**Mrs. Aheer:** On that note, my whole point is that to continue to legislate on behalf of any vulnerable population is absolutely the imperative of any government, and to even push a government further to do better is absolutely imperative of the opposition. I don't deny that for one moment, and I appreciate anything that happens to push me to be a better legislator at any point, whether that's on the side of the opposition or whether that's here.

I will hold true to where I stand on this in the sense that I believe that the legislation that we are passing here is the strongest protections in the country. We will make sure, in the words of our Education minister, to protect every child.

I would like to also mention, Madam Chair, that doesn't just mean children that are in vulnerable situations. If a government, a previous government, goes out to create a vulnerability in a child that's actually standing up for the kids, like mine, that created a vulnerability where there wasn't one. How does one stand up for that? How does one even stand in the House knowing that you've created vulnerabilities in others by trying to stand up for one? The whole point is to stand up for every child. Love is love; isn't that what we say?

**10:10 a.m.**

Standing up for every child is what matters here. You can't create one vulnerability and take away – you can't take away the strength and the love of one child in order to create strength in another and create a vulnerability where there was not one before. You end up losing the forest for the trees, Madam Chair. The whole point is to create a society where acceptance and true love and understanding is available. You don't do that by creating division. You don't do that by pitting kids against each other and, more importantly, to take a vulnerability and to use a child as a political football, whether that was my baby or anybody else's baby. He's 22 now; he's still my baby. He's 22 now; he's still traumatized by that situation. He's 22 and he will go out every single day and help out any human who needs help in any capacity because that's who he is and that's how he was raised.

The government on our side, we are desperately seeking to elevate the cause of the Alberta experience in whatever capacity that is, and we will continue to love people and to honour them and

to cherish them and to elevate them and to build momentum and to bring back into our province people of all diversities, of all backgrounds, all different kinds of people, because that's what Alberta is.

You know, I always use the metaphor of the camps at Fort Mac. You have a hundred thousand people crammed together in an area, people who don't know each other. The person beside you might have your life in their hands because they're holding a drill bit, and you depend on them to make sure that you survive your job that day because they have a heavy job and you depend on them. And you learned the night before that they come from a particular background, have a particular sexuality, eat different kinds of foods, so many different things that define them as a person. You learn about that person organically because you're put together in a situation where you get to be friends. You learn to care about each other, and you learn to honour each other for who you are.

You know, I come from a mixed background. My dad is Southeast Asian and my mom is Irish, English, Scottish, and Scandinavian. I remember as a little girl, when the Aryan Nations popped up in Caroline, Alberta, being referred to as an abomination because I was from a mixed background. I remember writing a letter to them, going: prove it. Then I went to my school, and my principal and I wrote a small paper on, you know, white supremacism and racism, and we presented it to my school, just to talk about what goes on. I was probably the first person of colour that lived out in that area although I think I resonated with the Italian families because I kind of looked like them and they sort of took me under their wing.

Actually, it was really interesting because when we had the conversation, it started something really beautiful. It started a wonderful conversation around acceptance and understanding a different culture. It didn't turn into this nasty thing. It turned into a wonderful conversation about who we are as human beings. Isn't that why we're all here?

The question you need to ask isn't whether people are trying to divide; it's whether or not we can bring people together. What is our job here? Our job here is to elevate. Our job here is to bring our personal stories, no matter how painful or how wonderful, to try and impact a difference so that we grow as a province and we become better.

There are so many people here with stories, incredible stories of resilience, incredible stories of where they come from, where they travelled to, how they even got into Canada, incredible stories of growing up on small farms. I know people in this House that grew up on farms that didn't have running water. When I was a little girl, we all had party lines. You'd have to wait for your turn to talk on the phone, you know, and sometimes you were listening in on other people's conversations, which wasn't a very good thing but it happened sometimes. But the thing is that as a society we've evolved so much. I remember people who lived out on farms that didn't have running water and proper telephones. People looked at them like they were different, like somehow they were subpar because they didn't have the regular necessities of life. It took time to bring those relationships forward and understand that these were actually resilient, strong, incredible human beings that deserved to be treated fairly and with kindness and the love that we know that Albertans are just full of. That's who we are.

I beg of the opposition: please stop – stop – with the divisiveness. Stop. Understand that every time that happens, you break us apart. You break our province. You break us into tiny, little pieces of shattered glass from this incredible opportunity to bring us together through inclusivity, multiculturalism, wonderful societies working together.

If we make mistakes, you're going to hold us accountable, and I'm glad that you will. Democracy is defined by a strong opposition, and I honour that every single day. But let's start on the same page

together. Let's work on this together. You will let us know if we're failing; that's fair, completely fair. None of us will ever take that away. I've been in opposition. I know how important that is.

But if you think for one minute that I will stand here, having known what my own child went through, having known that a particular side of the government didn't do anything to defend that young man – and many people in this room know my kid and know who he is. Let me explain something to you. That experience changed me forever. It changed the way I look at people. It changed the way that I approach people, for the good. It didn't make me any more angry or frustrated; it made me realize I have to do more and to try harder and to work more and to earn trust. I will do that every day, and there's nothing that the opposition can say to take that away.

Let me explain something to you. Every time you take away something from one kid – and you are talking about one kid. That happened to my child. And you know what? He bounced back better and stronger, more loving, and more incredible than ever. I've never been so proud.

We will continue on this side to be resilient. We will continue on this side to build. We will continue on this side to make sure that people have the love and compassion and the tools that they need to build this province back up to where it needs to be. I am so proud to be Albertan, and I'm so proud to be in this House. I'm so proud of my kid, and I am so proud that he stood up to the absolutely despicable things that were said about him and my family on social media. I'm so proud that he continues on no matter what and that he will not be held down.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, any more speakers to amendment A6? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to briefly stand to defend my colleague the Member for Edmonton-South. That member has been one of the fiercest allies. He was a member of a GSA when he was a student. He was there as an ally. He's been at countless rallies, marches. He's been here in this House, day after day, sharing the stories of students and offering impassioned speeches.

The member opposite noted that she was offended on behalf of the LGBTQ community. Well, I'm a member of the community, and I'm absolutely not offended by what the member said. The Member for Edmonton-South walks the talk. I, my colleagues, and his constituents have absolutely no doubts about his intentions, and to question that is, frankly, unacceptable. We'll stand with him and we'll stand with every queer student across this province every day, every dang day.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

**The Chair:** I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

**The Chair:** We are back on the main bill. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

**The Chair:** I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Any opposed?

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 8 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:20 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For:

|                    |               |                 |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer              | Loewen        | Rowswell        |
| Amery              | Lovely        | Rutherford      |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Luan          | Schow           |
| Dreeshen           | Madu          | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Getson             | Neudorf       | Singh           |
| Glasgo             | Nixon, Jason  | Smith           |
| Goodridge          | Nixon, Jeremy | Toor            |
| Hanson             | Orr           | van Dijken      |
| Horner             | Rehn          | Walker          |
| Hunter             | Rosin         | Yao             |
| LaGrange           |               |                 |

Against:

|          |         |               |
|----------|---------|---------------|
| Bilous   | Gray    | Pancholi      |
| Dach     | Hoffman | Renaud        |
| Dang     | Irwin   | Shepherd      |
| Goehring | Nielsen | Sigurdson, L. |

|         |          |              |
|---------|----------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 31 | Against – 12 |
|---------|----------|--------------|

[Request to report Bill 8 carried]

**The Chair:** Do you want to rise and report?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Madam Chair, I apologize. We've been here a long time. I would like to move that we rise and report Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain 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 committee reports Bill 8.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

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

**Government Bills and Orders**  
**Third Reading**  
*(continued)*

**Bill 8**  
**Education Amendment Act, 2019**

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move third and final reading of Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, all 41 pages of it.

The Education Act, through the amendments proposed in Bill 8, will help to strengthen and modernize Alberta's education system. This legislation better supports local decision-making and puts school boards in the best position to determine the needs of the students they serve. It will help the talented teachers, principals, school support staff, and trustees to deliver a modern education system so that all Alberta children can reach their full potential. It will create an education system that is more collaborative, more flexible, and more focused on students' success.

We are building on years of consultation with Albertans and stakeholders by amending the Education Act, that was passed by the Legislature in 2012, of which there are 170 pages, actually 170-plus pages. As well, extensive consultation continued over the years, and amendments were made in 2015 with the anticipation of it coming into full force in 2016. Unfortunately, that did not happen due to the election; the previous election, that is. We are making sure our students receive the excellent education that all Albertans expect and deserve. This bill will make Alberta's education system even better, and improvements will not come at a cost to vulnerable students.

With our government's commitment to have the Education Act come into force for the 2019-2020 school year, we recognized that some updates were needed. This is why we brought forward Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. There were a few amendments that were needed to address things that have changed since 2012 and since 2015 and to provide stability to the education system. This includes keeping the current age of access, the age of compulsory attendance, and residency rules. We know the existing rules are working well for students and school boards at this time.

As well, the Education Act was drafted under different circumstances. In 2012 the province was booming, and more students were dropping out of high school early, intent on getting jobs and making money. Today students are not dropping out at the same rates, which is, of course, a very good thing, but changing the age of access now would bring more students into the system at a fiscally challenging time for the province. As well, other programs are currently providing this service to those students who need additional time to complete their studies.

We also know it is important that parents do not pay school fees for specific instructional materials needed in a classroom such as textbooks and paper. The Education Act, through regulations, will continue this current practice of restricting school boards from charging fees on these specific materials. We will also keep the current rules around superintendent compensation, which is in alignment with Alberta's expectations for public officials' pay. We will also propose to keep the current implementation plan for leadership certification and teaching quality standards. This plan has broad support from all stakeholders and makes sense to continue.

Other amendments in Bill 8 are minor technical updates to align the Education Act with other pieces of legislation or current practices. We will also maintain the current timeline of 2020 for

when changes to the common kindergarten age of entry come into effect. We're also updating the language around establishing separate school districts to reflect the current practice.

During the course of the debate on this bill we heard a lot of misconceptions and misinformation about protections for students who participate in GSAs, QSAs, or other inclusion groups. Let me once again state that our government absolutely opposes mandatory parental notification of student involvement in inclusion groups. Alberta will have the most comprehensive statutory protections for GSAs in Canada, and creating a GSA is not optional once it has been requested by students.

*10:30 a.m.*

The privacy of students is protected under Alberta's strict privacy laws. It always has been; it always will be, as the members opposite are well aware. Schools cannot disclose a student's membership in any inclusion group as a matter of routine, and all school authorities are required to follow privacy legislation. As the Privacy Commissioner has made perfectly clear, public schools are required to follow the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and private schools must adhere to the Personal Information Protection Act, or PIPA. They had to abide by these regulations under the NDP's Bill 24 and will continue to do so under the Education Act. School authorities may only disclose personal information if authorized under these laws. Every child is unique, and parents, not politicians, know what is best for their children. The Education Act balances protecting children and their privacy with the rights of parents. Above all, we must make sure our children are getting the supports they need.

While we're on the topic of inclusion, we're also ensuring that all publicly funded schools, including accredited private schools, must adhere to welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments and student codes of conduct. Sorry. Welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment policies and student codes of conduct. I wanted to make sure I got "policies" in there. Our amendments clarify this board obligation, not remove it.

Another frequent topic raised during the debate had to do with trustees. Under the Education Act, boards will still be required to develop and implement codes of conduct for trustees, which will now have to include definitions of breaches and sanctions, up to and including disqualification of a trustee from the board. I want to be perfectly clear. The Education Act will not allow a group of trustees to gang up on other trustees at any time, for any reason, and fire them. That is just not going to happen. This is about professional conduct and clarity of expectations for trustees. It will enable each board to develop their own code of conduct that defines what type of trustee behaviour or breach would result in disqualification. Trustees will be expected to follow the code set by their school board and have clarity on proper conduct.

Moving on to the topic of charter schools, the Education Act ensures that charter schools will continue to have an important role in Alberta's education system by offering more choice for students and their parents. Our government remains committed to making sure that parents have options that best meet the educational needs of their children. The ability to add more charter schools in Alberta will have an overall positive effect on the system. Alberta has a long and successful tradition of supporting school choice, and we will continue to honour that tradition. After all, Albertans overwhelmingly elected us to honour that tradition.

Finally, for private schools this bill changes some terminology, from "an operator of a private school" to "a person responsible for the operation of a private school." If a person or a society is operating a private school and they don't have elected trustees but they have a governing board or society, rules in the Education Act

still apply. Just so everyone is clear, the meaning remains the same. This is simply a terminology adjustment.

In conclusion, Bill 8 will ensure that the Education Act, when in force, will more effectively serve the long-term needs of Alberta's students. I'm also very pleased to share that this has had very broad support from stakeholders, including parents, students, administrators, and trustees. Many, many of these individuals and groups have written, e-mailed, or called to my office to voice their support. With this legislation we are building on our province's foundation of excellence and creating an education environment that provides schools and educators with the tools necessary to improve student outcomes. I believe that amending the previously passed Education Act will allow it to serve as a blueprint for the education system for years to come while providing the most stability and certainty for today.

I hope you will all join me in supporting this important piece of legislation. It's been a long time coming. Albertans overwhelmingly elected this government to bring the Education Act into force, and as a House let's stand together and honour that commitment. I apologize for stumbling; it's been a very long number of days. But I really do feel that this is going to be the best piece of legislation to move our province and our K to 12 education system forward.

I thank you all.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, it has been a number of days, so much so that my mother is watching us online right now to see her daughter, as I'm sure all of your parents are and children as well.

Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 8 in third reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak against Bill 8 at third reading, and I want to specifically reiterate something my colleagues and I have been saying and proving through the debate throughout, that Bill 8 weakens existing protections for LGBTQ2S youth and the formation of GSAs in this province. This fundamentally weakens existing provisions.

I would also like to address a couple of comments from members on the government bench that, without the benefit of the Blues, I can unfortunately only paraphrase: essentially, if this legislation is not right, then the opposition will hold us to account, and that is how the situation in this Legislature should work. I would like to remind the government members of who we are dealing with in this legislation, and that is vulnerable youth. When this legislation fails youth who are trying to form a GSA, it is the youth who will be the ones to suffer because of that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I would like to remind this House that we know and have discussed numerous times in this House that our LGBTQ2S youth face higher rates of discrimination, higher rates of violence and abuse, mental health concerns, self-harm, suicidality when they go to school in hostile environments. We know from the surveys of Alberta's LGBTQ2S youth that over 50 per cent of them perceive schools to be hostile, unsafe environments when there are no supports for GSAs. My comments to you, Mr. Speaker, are that this bill weakens existing protections for our students, for our youth, for GSAs in our schools, and the result of that is going to be felt by these students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to third reading of Bill 8? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the call.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments fairly brief. I think I've been fairly thorough throughout this entire debate. We have spent a lot of time comparing language to other jurisdictions. We've said that we will have some of the most comprehensive in the country but not the best, and we should be striving for the best. I've always said that language is everything. You change one word in a sentence, you change the entire sentence.

In Bill 8 we are dealing with language, some of it as old as seven to 10 years, depending on the consultation period and when it was proclaimed. I know that part of the mandate of the government around red tape is to look at old language and potentially remove it, so I'm kind of wondering now what's going on.

I'm still concerned around all the language around the trustees. I think it leaves things open for potential problems that I don't think needed to be created.

I am very concerned around the weak language proposed in Bill 8 around GSAs and QSAs. To say that privacy laws will protect the participants in these clubs: it is, unfortunately, after the fact when it happens. I've said this before. By the time we are looking at trying to pursue penalties for breaching the privacy, the privacy has already been breached. We should be creating language that stops it before it gets there, and Bill 8 doesn't allow that. There are holes in the language.

*10:40 a.m.*

To say that schools are expected to follow the policy is not good enough. We've seen that when we thought that schools were expected to follow the policy, the former Education minister had to go farther because they weren't followed. If it was so clear that they were to be expected to follow it, why didn't they? This is not good enough.

Mr. Speaker, I find myself unable to support Bill 8 here in third reading. I hope that members in this House at the last moment will realize the failings that Bill 8 has and will reconsider their position.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for a brief question or comment. Does anyone like to make a brief question or comment? The hon. Minister of Education has risen.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the hon. member that just spoke in regards to language being very important. I have sat through months of debate and listening, and I found it very troubling, the implications that have been made against members on this side of the House, against government members. I do know that every single one of my colleagues in this House has the very best heart for all students, including our lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, LGBTQ2S, and two-spirited. I apologize if I miss any, because it has been a long time. It does cut to the heart when you get attacked on a day-to-day basis for things that are not true. Therefore, I really feel that language is important and we need to get it right. I do believe that we are finding the right language in the Education Amendment Act and in the Education Act as a whole. But for hon. members to imply otherwise, that this side of the House does not support LGBTQ students, is incorrect, and I would like that on the record.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if the member would like to respond or anyone else has a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has the call.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise once again to place on the record my views but also the views of my constituents, of students, of parents, of teachers, of allies who have contacted myself, my colleagues to express their concerns. I'm pleased to stand, potentially for the last time, to speak to those issues and place on them on the record with respect to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019.

As I've laid out in detail – and I won't go into that right now – in fact, despite the Minister of Education's best intentions around proclaiming a piece of legislation that is intended to modernize the school system, the Education Act does not do that. I have laid out in great detail that less than 10 per cent of the Education Act as it is put forward by this government is in any way substantially different from the current School Act, less than 10 per cent. Primarily where it has been amended by this government has been only to repeal those provisions in the original Education Act that would have modernized the system, that would have allowed for extending the age of access, mandatory education. Those provisions were taken out by this government.

The only other substantial changes they made were actually to impart the significant changes that the NDP government made to the School Act around separate school establishment and school fees and trustee codes of conduct. The only glaring absence from what they took from the NDP's amendments to the School Act is the provision around GSAs.

While I appreciate that the Minister of Education will continue and has continued to stand up and say that the intent of introducing Bill 8 is about modernizing the school system and doing something different, unfortunately that is not the case. That is just not the case.

In fact, interestingly enough, the 2012 Education Act, as amended in 2014, could have just been proclaimed by this government. It was already passed legislation. They could have proclaimed it as it was, and in fact that's what their platform said. Their platform said that the Education Act will be proclaimed. That's what they committed to, but they didn't actually do that. They could have done that without bringing that before this House, before this Assembly. It was passed legislation, and all it needed was proclamation, but they didn't do that. They brought it back before this Assembly for the sole purpose of gutting some of the key transformational provisions from that act.

When they made the decision to take out the key transformational provisions of the act but to take some of the things that the NDP government had done to the School Act, with the exception of the GSA provisions, it made it very clear to all what the intent behind Bill 8 really is. That is why the members on this side of the House have referred to this bill as Bill Hate or Bill Straight, because that is what it's about. It can be dressed up in many other ways, and the Minister of Education has spoken many times about what she believes the intent of the bill is, but the fact of the matter is that the only reason that this bill is being brought before the Assembly and why there are changes to the Education Act is to weaken the protections for LGBTQ2S-plus students and GSAs. That is the sole intent. That is what this is really about.

Now, I'm quite proud of the fact that we can look over the record of debate on this bill in this House and that numerous times my colleagues have risen to impart significant information for the benefit of the Assembly and for the benefit of those who watch us online – the three people out there – and for those people who read *Hansard*. They talked in great detail. They provided facts. They talked about the research, about the vulnerability around LGBTQ2S-plus students. That's a fact. We all know that. We all

know that they are some of our most vulnerable students, and I don't need to repeat it because there is a great record in *Hansard* right now, done by my colleagues, about the vulnerability of those students. We know that's why GSAs are so important. There's also a great record about the importance of GSAs to help those vulnerable kids.

Even more than that, we've had numerous personal accounts from students, from teachers. We've heard them speaking out on the steps of the Legislature. They've reached out to us by e-mail, through social media. They've come to our constituency offices. I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and I have met with teachers, who expressed their support for the vulnerable kids in their school. They asked us to maintain the protections in the GSAs that were currently set out under Bill 24 and the School Act. We've heard those stories, very stirring for all of us, I hope. We've heard the very personal account from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who is the only openly gay member of this Assembly. She stood up and gave her personal story, not only of coming out but also as a teacher. We've heard those stories. We know they are true. We can all have those stories. I'm sure we all know people in our constituencies, in our lives, in our communities who share those views, who value those members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community, who want to see them supported, who want to see them flourish, as we all want all Albertans to.

So we've gotten this great record. I'm really proud of it. I'm really proud of what's on the record in *Hansard* from my colleagues because they've really shared that, and I think it should really resonate with a lot of Albertans. It was because of those stories that Bill 24 was brought in by the NDP government. We heard about the deficiencies that existed in the current provisions that are now in the Education Act. There were deficiencies. We knew that. That was why Bill 24 was brought into place. In fact, as many of the members in this House may know, there was actually a legal challenge to Bill 24 brought by a significant number of private schools, by organizations such as Parents for Choice in Education and the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, whose members are also members of the governing party. They challenged Bill 24. They brought a legal challenge, and twice Alberta courts have upheld the provisions of Bill 24.

*10:50 a.m.*

In fact, not too long ago, right after the campaign, actually, April 29, 2019, the Alberta Court of Appeal rendered its decision in PT versus Alberta. The citation for that, in case *Hansard* is interested, is 2019 ABCA 158. In that decision the Court of Appeal expressly looked at Bill 24. They looked at those provisions, and they upheld them. This is what the court said. At paragraph 109 of the decision – and in this case they're referring to Bill 24 – the Alberta Court of Appeal stated:

The legislation has been enacted to protect the privacy interests of all children in Alberta schools, including all children in the appellant schools, by allowing for the formation and operation of GSAs in their schools. The legislation supporting GSAs is aimed at ensuring that all schools provide a safe and open space for all students, including LGBTQ+ children who may be especially vulnerable.

[110] Attendance at a GSA is not compulsory. Attendance is voluntary. Nothing prevents an individual student from disclosing and discussing their attendance with their parents, if and when they so choose. Nothing prevents a parent from engaging in an open dialogue about GSAs in their child's school. Nor is a parent precluded from inquiring as to the existence of a GSA, who acts as the student liaison and whether the GSA participates in activities off school property.

[111] In the meantime, the legislation puts the choice of disclosure of a child's attendance at a voluntary GSA in the child's hands, not in the control of their parents, their school or its school board. The public good presumed in protecting the safety and privacy interests of these individual children, as well as promoting an inclusive school environment generally, is extremely high . . .

[112] The evidence of the good achieved by GSAs in protecting the safety and privacy interests of individual children is more compelling than the new evidence of schools' termination of funding for non-compliance with the legislation. . . .

Mr. Speaker, the NDP caucus has presented the government members with a number of reasonable amendments to Bill 8. We've heard them repeatedly state that they support LGBTQ2S-plus students. We've heard them say that repeatedly. We've heard them say repeatedly that they support GSAs. They hold up the existing provisions of the Education Act, and they walk through the steps of the formation of the GSAs and say: "There. See? We support it." But we've heard that that wasn't sufficient, and that's why Bill 24 and the School Act revisions went further.

What we've done is that we've made reasonable amendments to hold them to account, to say: "If you truly do support LGBTQ2S-plus students and GSAs, why would you not support these amendments? Why would you not support the immediate establishment of a GSA when a child, a student, requests it? Why would you not want to let the students decide the name for their GSA or their QSA? Why would you not want to protect the privacy of those students so that they can make the decision about coming out, if they so choose, in their own time?"

If that is generally the interest, the government has been provided with a number of opportunities to support amendments to this bill that truly would walk the talk. They would have an opportunity to actually support amendments that would do exactly what they claim to be doing, and it's been with great disappointment that every single amendment the opposition caucus has put forward has been voted down, with barely anybody on the other side even speaking to it. It's been incredibly disappointing.

I personally am at least proud that I've done what I could to give a voice to the most vulnerable kids, the students, those whom we are most entrusted to represent. I've done my part. I know my colleagues have done their part. There's one last opportunity here for the government members to step up and do their part.

We have in this House now the ability to vote with your conscience. You are now going to be held accountable by your constituents as to how you vote on this matter, on GSAs, on protecting LGBTQ2S-plus students, young people who are the most vulnerable in our system, in our communities. You're not compelled by a confidence vote to vote along party lines. You have an opportunity to vote with your conscience, and I urge you to take this last opportunity. Trust me; I'm not naive enough to think you'll take me up on it. But I urge you to take this opportunity to truly stand up for the most vulnerable students, who you are here to represent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available to make a brief question or comment. I see that the Minister of Education has risen.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, once again, would like to state that I as a former trustee anticipated this Education Act for over 11 years. I took part in the extensive, extensive consultations that occurred over the years. I was part of the amendments that occurred and so on. I am holding the March 1,

2016, copy, that should have come into full force at that time. But due to the election and a new government, who chose not to bring it into force when boards were continuously asking for it, asking "When will that Education Act be fully in force so that we can use the natural person powers and some of the other very, very good pieces that are in this piece of legislation?" – I'm happy to say that we will be able to bring it into force and that the amendment act that we brought forward further aligns with what is the current reality and some of the things that we needed to address in terms of the kindergarten age of access and transportation issues, et cetera, et cetera.

Going back to what was just stated by the hon. member on the amendments that were brought forward, how was an amendment helpful that started with the words "that everything after the word 'that' should be eliminated"? That was not a helpful amendment.

On the other amendment that was brought forward, where we were able to show that it was already in the body of our amendment act and, not only that, that our amendment act went further to ensure that private schools will adhere to the law, we were able to show that, and they were able to then say of their amendment: oh, yes; it is in there.

I believe that we have given very thoughtful consideration to the amendments. I continue to hear that GSAs, QSAs will not be allowed, that we're putting children in danger. That is absolutely, categorically false. We've said it time and time again. It's in the act, it's in the amendment act, and I just don't know what else to say other than that I just wanted to put that on the record.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for a brief question and comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** I just want to tease apart some of the things the minister just said. The act originally was passed in 2012. It wasn't proclaimed in 2012 or 2013 or 2014 or even the beginning of 2015 because there were significant issues with the act. It wasn't because there was an election called in 2015 that it didn't get proclaimed. It was because there were significant issues.

Then the minister went on to say: well, it should have been passed in 2016. But then the minister herself brought forward an amendment act because the bill wasn't good, Mr. Speaker. The act that was passed had significant issues. She admits that because she brought forward an amending act. The amendment act took most of the things that we did as a government to make education better, like capping school fees, bringing in leadership quality standards, making sure that the bands for superintendent compensation were brought over that we brought in. Most of the things that we did got brought over.

The thing that didn't get brought over was: have immediacy, have confidentiality, and have the name of the group for GSAs be transferred over. That's because the minister, in her own words when she was seeking the nomination for the party, said that she didn't support those bills. She thought that they were pushing a different agenda.

Well, Mr. Speaker, our agenda is keeping kids safe. That's why we brought forward those amendments. If the minister wanted to keep kids safe, she could have either not brought forward the amending act, she could have not pushed to proclaim the Education Act, or she could have just left things the way they were. The courts upheld the decision twice, because things did improve safety for students, and there's still more to be done. Even after those changes, the most recent data from government of Alberta surveys shows that 53 per cent of queer youth in schools don't feel safe.

What this government is doing is growing that gap, growing opportunities for inequality, Mr. Speaker. I wish that the words that are coming out of their mouths reflected reality, but the truth is that they are pushing this bill forward, which moves things backwards, not forwards. The truth is that they are intentionally doing this to move back in time, which is what the Premier said he would do.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to speak to third reading of Bill 8? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

11:00 a.m.

**Mr. Carson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do just want to take only a brief moment here to put my final thoughts on the record. I think that my opinion on this bill, Bill 8, has been stated quite clearly through the debate that's taken place over the last few weeks. I do just want to first of all thank the members of the opposition that took the opportunity to share stories from their constituents, share stories about how this issue affects them personally, specifically the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood once again, being the only openly LGBTQ member of this Assembly. I think that we should pause and take her words quite seriously. I do, of course, also want to thank the members of the government, the few of them that took the opportunity to stand and speak briefly. I do appreciate their comments on the record, and I thank them for that. Of course, I also would like to thank my own community for sharing their stories with myself and other members of the House.

Of course, I am, well, very profoundly frustrated, frustrated with the fact that this government doesn't seem to be changing their opinion on the fact that this bill does not strengthen GSAs or QSAs in our province. It pushes to weaken them. They will of course not admit that fact, but that's the truth, and people in the LGBTQ community and the students and the teachers and the education system as a whole can see that.

My final point would just be that I would plead with this government to change their opinion of this bill. Do not support it. Private members, other than the front bench, please consider the implications of this legislation. You know, the ministers and members of the government talk about being allies, but today we are not seeing that. Over the next four years or however long they are members of the government, they could raise as many pride flags as they would like and say as many nice words about the LGBTQ community as they like, but the fact is that if they move forward with weakening the ability of students and schools to form GSAs, as is laid out in this Bill 8 legislation, they are in fact turning their backs on the LGBTQ community in our province, and that is profoundly disappointing, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I talked about earlier, it's been truly an honour to have had the stories of so many shared with me and with my colleagues and to have been able to present so many of those stories here in the House, stories from teachers, from students, from parents, people young and old, from rural and urban settings, queer folks, and allies. I wish that I could share all the stories that I've received because it means so much to have people reach out to us and to make themselves vulnerable in the hopes of bringing about change in our province.

Perhaps for the last time I want to share one of those stories. This one resonated with me as a teacher and as a member of the LGBTQ community. I cannot share her name, but, please, I ask you to hear her words.

I am a 27-year-old woman and I am a lesbian . . .

For the past five years, I have been a full-time teacher in rural central Alberta. I do my best to provide a safe and caring learning environment for all my students, which is the duty of all teachers and therefore the duty of the government that directs us. This means a safe and caring learning environment for children with learning disabilities, children who come from broken homes, children who are from minority backgrounds or religions, and children who are LGBTQ. It has become increasingly difficult to establish a safe and caring learning environment when I personally do not feel safe or cared for by the governing party in this province.

I have to hide a very large part of my identity on a daily basis. I worry about homophobic harassment and I worry about repercussions on my career. I live in a constant state of anxiety where I worry that someone from my school might see me out with my partner and ask questions. I don't worry about the students judging me, but I do worry about parents. What if they no longer want me teaching their child? What if they make a complaint? Am I going to lose my job? The fact that I even have to consider this is ridiculous, but the current legislation in Bill 8 makes it very clear to me that I am not worthy of the same protection against discrimination as my heterosexual colleagues.

Coming to terms with being queer is enough of a struggle without the fear of being outed, judged, or punished. Children deserve to come to school in a province that supports all of them equally, no matter the label. Without the amendments proposed by the NDP, children will suffer. I know this, because I've lived it. It was my childhood. In my small town, I could not come out due to severe bullying and the threat of being thrown out of my parents' house. My father once told me he thought they should "round up all the gays and hang them". My mother blamed their divorce on the fact that I was gay and they could not cope with it. My teachers in high school were the only adults I felt comfortable confiding in, and I truly believe their acceptance was the only thing that helped me [to] survive.

As a teacher, I've heard parents complain about discussing LGBTQ issues in the classroom because "it's wrong for them to be mentioned" . . . I've had parents make disparaging homophobic comments in front of me, and I could do nothing. I felt powerless, and I am an adult. Imagine how it must feel for a child who has nobody to turn to. A GSA might be the only safe space for these vulnerable youth . . . Being queer is not offensive or wrong, and our students deserve to know that.

Thank you to that teacher.

I urge you for one last time to heed her words and the words of all the other folks that we've shared in this House. To all those who've shared their stories with me and with my NDP colleagues: thank you. We see you, we value you, we love you, and no matter the outcome of this vote we will continue to stand with you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if someone would like to make a brief question or comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to, briefly, very much stand in solidarity with the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who's led this caucus together with great strength and wisdom on this issue. I think that, following the remarks of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I'd like to make it be known to all members of the LGBTQ2S-plus community that notwithstanding what happens with Bill 8, there is

a safe place in this province that they can go to, no matter where in this province you live. It is in the office of your NDP opposition MLA. Please always know that you can contact us, communicate your experiences with us. We want to know about your GSA applications. We respect your views. We have your backs. We always will.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone would like to make an additional brief question or comment.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Education to close debate, should she choose.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe we've had ample time to debate this amendment. I believe what I've said all along, that it is a very good amendment, that we look forward to the Education Act coming into full force with the amendment in place. I would encourage all the members to vote in favour of it. I close debate.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:09 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

|                    |               |                 |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer              | Lovely        | Rowswell        |
| Amery              | Luan          | Rutherford      |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Madu          | Schow           |
| Barnes             | McIver        | Schweitzer      |
| Dreeshen           | Milliken      | Shandro         |
| Ellis              | Neudorf       | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Getson             | Nicolaides    | Singh           |
| Glasgo             | Nixon, Jason  | Smith           |
| Goodridge          | Nixon, Jeremy | Toor            |
| Hanson             | Orr           | van Dijken      |
| Horner             | Pitt          | Walker          |
| Hunter             | Rehn          | Wilson          |
| LaGrange           | Rosin         | Yao             |
| Loewen             |               |                 |

Against the motion:

|          |         |               |
|----------|---------|---------------|
| Bilous   | Gray    | Pancholi      |
| Carson   | Hoffman | Renaud        |
| Dach     | Irwin   | Shepherd      |
| Dang     | Nielsen | Sigurdson, L. |
| Goehring |         |               |

|         |          |              |
|---------|----------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 40 | Against – 13 |
|---------|----------|--------------|

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

### Bill 13 Alberta Senate Election Act

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we are at Bill 13. The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move the third reading of Bill 13, the Alberta Senate Election Act.

It seems like there's a little bit more of a jump in our steps here, so I'm going to be pretty brief in my remarks regarding Bill 13. I also just want to acknowledge all the hard-working people that have been up in the gallery here, all the work that they've done, all the staff, all the people here that make this happen. Mr. Speaker, to you and your team as well: we commend you for all the hard work that you've done here this spring. I appreciate all that hard work.

Albertans should be proud of the leadership role that Alberta has played in Senate reform here in Canada. We've been a leader on this front going back to 1987, when first legislation was passed to bring in Senate elections here in Alberta. Five out of 10 of the Senators that were nominated by this province went on to be appointed to the Senate. Some of those individuals have been probably the best Senators in Alberta history. We're proud of the work that they've done. This was just illustrated recently, Mr. Speaker, with the controversial bills C-69 and C-48, that just recently passed in Ottawa. The elected Senators Scott Tannas, Doug Black led the charge on behalf of Alberta against these bills, acting on Albertans' behalf, acting in their best interests.

That is why it is so critical at this point in time in our juncture that we bring back Senate elections, that we make sure that Albertans have their voice heard in Ottawa in the Senate. That is why we're making sure that we bring forward this legislation now. It's timely. We need to have this done. There's a Senate vacancy coming up in 2021. Going forward, we need to make sure that Albertans' voices are heard and that Albertans make sure that their priorities are there in Ottawa.

I had a few more notes here, Mr. Speaker, that I could go into, but I want to be a little bit brief here today. This speech was drafted a few days ago, and probably a little bit more timely thought may go into this, but I want to make sure that I thank everyone here in this House. We've had a vigorous debate. I believe that this bill is critical for the future of democratic reform in this province. I'm looking forward to those elections being held in our province. I want to thank everybody for their hard work on this.

I'm going to sit down and see if anybody else has anything to say.

**The Speaker:** Thank you to the hon. member. Given that it's still Wednesday here in the Assembly, I imagine that the speech was actually prepared today.

Are there others wishing to speak to third reading of Bill 13? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the third and final reading of Bill 13, the act looking at senatorial elections here in the province of Alberta, the Alberta Senate Election Act. I'd like to echo the comments from the Minister of Justice. Indeed, we appreciate the support we've received from all of the fine legislative staff who've been here with us throughout the longest Wednesday in Alberta history. I imagine we're all thankful it was a Wednesday as opposed to a Monday. Generally, even Garfield didn't like Mondays. I apologize. My quality of humour declines with the length of the day, as much as we may all attempt.

*11:30 a.m.*

With that in mind, I'd like to put a few brief thoughts on the record regarding this bill before we have the opportunity – we shall see, I guess – to see what the will is of the House. I recognize where the government is coming from with this bill. You know, certainly, we've had some robust discussion as a country about the value of the Canadian Senate, how it should be approached. We've had promises from some federal parties, and certainly all parties have had some policy of some sort around Senate reform. We saw

attempts to move towards an elected Senate. We've seen the changes that have been brought forward under the current federal government. We've had other parties that have called for the utter abolishment of the Senate altogether.

But ultimately what we have here in choosing to return to this elected process here in the province of Alberta: it's still buying into a flawed system, buying into a system that is undemocratic in the sense that it is putting up people with appointments for life. There is that lack of accountability there. Even if an individual is elected to that position, there is no accountability once they are there. We are dependent on them, I guess, to make those decisions, and they are there until they should choose to step down, until they reach the age of 75, whichever comes first.

We recognize that Alberta continues to have an incredibly disproportionately low number of Senators compared to other jurisdictions in Canada given that we have only six Senators. Then, by comparison, Prince Edward Island has four. While we have a population of approximately 714,356 Albertans per Senator as of 2017, Prince Edward Island, then, had 38,005.

Again, it is still a flawed system that we are buying into, that we are choosing to give our endorsement, and, in the process of doing that, spending taxpayer money for that exercise. Generally I can understand that the government feels that this is an important gesture, that they feel this is something that improves this process. In my view, I'm not really sure that it adds any additional value to the situation.

I did want to observe, though, that I do appreciate the work that Alberta Senators have done. Certainly, I've seen some great thoughts that have come from Senator Doug Black. I've seen some great thoughts that have come from others. In particular, I just wanted to note one of the recent Senators that was appointed to the Senate. I've deeply appreciated the work of Senator Paula Simons. She has done an amazing job of engaging with Albertans, engaging with Canadians, indeed, through social media has thoughtfully laid out all of her steps, all of her process by which she has come to her decisions, the reasons that she has made them.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that that is an improvement on our democratic process. She has engaged thoughtfully and critically. She hasn't resorted to stale talking points. She hasn't bought into cheap narratives. At times she has been attacked and misrepresented, but I just wanted to state on the record that whether or not we agree with decisions that she may have made, I think that she demonstrates what a thoughtful legislator is intended to do, and that is to engage with constituents. I want to recognize also that she took the step of ensuring that Alberta had a voice on the committee in the Senate which deals with energy and natural resources. Alberta had no voice at that committee. When Senator Simons was appointed, she fought to get on that committee to ensure that Alberta's voice would be heard.

As much as we may be frustrated with the decisions that the majority of Senators make, I think we can take pride that we have Alberta Senators who are working to ensure that we have the best representation we can and that as this government continues to stand up for Alberta and we as an opposition continue to do the same, we can work with those folks that are there in the Senate to make sure that we continue to advance things as best we can for our province.

With that, I conclude my remarks on this bill.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 13 at third reading? The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I appreciate the opportunity to rise on third reading, Mr. Speaker, and provide a few brief remarks. It's been a

long Wednesday, and I'm looking forward to getting on with Friday. Somehow along the way we lost Thursday. I don't know what happened there, but that's the way the Legislature works.

I do want to provide a couple quick comments. First off, I'd like to respond to the hon. member from the opposition's arguments and presentation in this Chamber on Senate elections. To spend his portion of time in third reading trying to defend Senator Simons' actions as an unelected Senator inside the Senate, I think, is ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. It also points out the problem that we face as a province, and I do appreciate that the Minister of Justice is attempting to at least provide us some sort of say in that process. I know Senator Simons, and I get along with her. I have had many a nice conversation with her, but the reality is that she stood inside the Senate just a few short weeks ago and voted against the province of Alberta, voted against Albertans, and voted against our energy industry.

While some of her intentions along the way may have been right, to vote against the people of her own province is completely ridiculous and what Albertans have rejected and is why we propose to go back to electing Senators in this province and trying to have the Prime Minister appoint them to the Senate, because the reality is that, as the Minister of Justice pointed out, our two elected Senators inside the Senate right now: that's who stood up for the province of Alberta from day one. They stood up for the province of Alberta the entire way, and they stood up when it really mattered, Mr. Speaker, when they stood up and they voted for Alberta. They stood and they voted for Alberta, which is what we expect when it comes to our Senators, so I thank the Minister of Justice for bringing this forward.

I think it's also important to point out that as we come near to what I think is probably the end of session – we'll see what the Chamber decides shortly – the reality is, though, that this is another promise made and another promise kept. We have talked along the last eight weeks inside this Chamber, well into the night, about the fact that the United Conservative Party was elected on a historical mandate, the largest mandate in the history of this province, to come and to implement the largest platform that was ever run on in the history of this province, a clear platform. I know you've read it, Mr. Speaker. I know you've read it back and forth many times while you were campaigning in your own constituency.

One of the promises in there was to renew the Senatorial Selection Act, to hold elections for senatorial nominees by 2021. Today, Mr. Speaker, if the Chamber votes to get third reading passed, that will be another promise made and another promise kept by the hon. Premier and his government. That's what this is about. The reality of why we are still here on a Wednesday, well into 48 hours on a Wednesday inside this Chamber: at its core, this started with the opposition filibustering senatorial elections, and it's ended there. Hopefully, that's over, the actions that they have taken to ultimately filibuster this legislation. Hopefully, we're able to pass what Albertans voted for and get past that, because that's what Albertans expect.

For the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre to rise on his last comments on this issue and try to defend an unelected Senator who voted against this province shows exactly what the problem is with the Senate at the moment but also what the problem is with the NDP in general. They continue to side with anybody but Albertans. They continue along the way to side with their close ally Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. He certainly does not want to see elected Senators because Senator Tannas and Senator Black were his worst nightmare during bills C-69 and C-48, and we want to send some more people up there that will defend this province.

Mr. Speaker, I will close with this, and hopefully we can test the room to see if they're ready to let the Legislature decide what is

going on with Bill 13 and make a decision. [interjection] Sorry. I thought the Opposition House Leader was talking to me, but he's clearly talking about something else, which is totally fine. But we'll let them make a decision on what is taking place inside this Chamber going forward.

I want to close by reminding everybody that this session started with bills like Bill 13, that were promised to the people of Alberta, who voted for it in overwhelming numbers on April 16. This government caucus, under the leadership of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the hon. Premier of this province, is following through on those promises, and I want to assure Albertans, through you, that we will continue to when we come back to this place. When we make promises, we're going to keep them even if that side of the House wants to filibuster and try to prevent things like senatorial elections.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader might have a request of the Assembly, perhaps?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, I sense that you're asking that I may want to seek the unanimous consent of this Chamber for one-minute bells for this division.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** Is there anyone else wishing to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to close debate should he choose.

11:40 a.m.

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Mr. Speaker, I move to close debate.

**The Speaker:** Well said.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:41 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

|                    |               |                 |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer              | Lovely        | Rutherford      |
| Amery              | Luan          | Sawhney         |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Madu          | Schow           |
| Barnes             | McIver        | Schweitzer      |
| Copping            | Milliken      | Shandro         |
| Dreeshen           | Neudorf       | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Ellis              | Nicolaides    | Singh           |
| Getson             | Nixon, Jason  | Smith           |
| Glasgo             | Nixon, Jeremy | Stephan         |
| Goodridge          | Orr           | Toews           |
| Hanson             | Pitt          | Toor            |
| Horner             | Rehn          | van Dijken      |
| Hunter             | Reid          | Walker          |
| LaGrange           | Rosin         | Wilson          |
| Loewen             | Rowswell      | Yao             |

Against the motion:

|        |          |               |
|--------|----------|---------------|
| Bilous | Eggen    | Nielsen       |
| Carson | Goehring | Pancholi      |
| Dach   | Irwin    | Sigurdson, L. |

Totals: For – 45 Against – 9

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

[some applause]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a notice that I would like to provide the House, but first of all, just briefly, I'd like to thank you and all your deputies for your hard work over the last few days; the Clerk and her team; the teams, of course, at *Hansard*; all the LAO staff; our pages, who have been incredible through some of the longest days inside this Chamber; the Sergeant-at-Arms' office as well as all caucus staff on all sides of the aisle and the government staff who have participated in this process. Lastly, I'd like to close off by thanking members in all parties inside the Chamber. It's been a long road, and I know we have disagreed lots along the way, but certainly it's been tough work, and we've been able to get that progress done. I wish you safe travels. Anybody who has not slept well, please take the time before they hit the road today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise you and all members that pursuant to Government Motion 26 the business for the 2019 spring sitting is concluded.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I thank the hon. Government House Leader, and prior to the proclamation of the session concluding, I too would like to echo some of the comments that the Government House Leader has made. On July 3 at 1:29 p.m., Wednesday began. That was approximately 46 hours and 20 minutes ago. This is the longest Wednesday or the longest single sitting day in Alberta's history.

I'd like to very briefly thank the staff of both caucuses. I'd also like to thank particularly the staff in the Speaker's office, who have also put in some additional hours. At no point in time in Alberta's history has committee sat as long as it has in duration in one sitting as it did over the past three days. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Airdrie-East as well as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie for their particularly lengthy and dedicated service to the Assembly. I'd also like to thank the broadcast services. If we are here, there are members at the control tower that are tending to the needs of our Assembly. Sheriffs, pages, legislative security staff, the table have done an absolutely incredible job. As you know, the table staff is not that large, and they have put in some very, very, very lengthy hours. While the opposition may have had shifts of six and the government may have shifts in the 25s or 30s, there were only six members of the table, so they have done an incredible job.

I'd also like to echo the comments that were made by the Government House Leader. Please, please, please, please, I know that you all have a very busy weekend scheduled, but there is nothing that's more important than you arriving safely, so please drive to arrive and ensure that you take whatever necessary steps to make sure you get to your next meeting and we have no concerns.

Lastly, I would like to invite all of the new members to join us at the front of the building for the time-honoured end-of-session traditions that I'm sure you've all been made very well aware of.

Having said that, pursuant to Government Motion 26 on July 2, 2019, the House now stands adjourned until October 2019.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:50 a.m. on Friday pursuant to Government Motion 26]



## Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 1st Session (2019)

Activity to Wednesday, July 3, 2019

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

\* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

### **Bill 1 — An Act to Repeal the Carbon Tax (\$) (Kenney)**

First Reading — 8 (*May 22, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 44 (*May 23, 2019 aft.*), 79-92 (*May 27, 2019 eve.*), 95-107 (*May 28, 2019 morn.*), 121-43 (*May 28, 2019 aft.*), 166-70 (*May 28, 2019 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 215-24 (*May 29, 2019 aft.*), 239-41 (*May 29, 2019 eve.*), (*May 30, 2019 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 246-51 (*May 30, 2019 morn.*), 327-339 (*Jun. 3, 2019 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 4, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2019 c1 ]

### **Bill 2 — An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business (Copping)**

First Reading — 58 (*May 27, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 145-52 (*May 28, 2019 eve.*), 189-90 (*May 29, 2019 morn.*), 236-39 (*May 29, 2019 eve.*), 375-79 (*Jun. 4, 2019 aft.*), 416-17 (*Jun. 4, 2019 eve.*), 448 (*Jun. 5, 2019 aft.*), (*Jun. 5, 2019 eve.*), (*Jun. 5, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 986-1002 (*Jun. 19, 2019 aft.*), 1090-99 (*Jun. 20, 2019 aft.*), 1218-22 (*Jun. 25, 2019 eve.*), 1235-44 (*Jun. 26, 2019 aft.*), 1293-1300 (*Jun. 27, 2019 aft.*), 1313-26 (*Jul. 2, 2019 aft.*), 1329-31 (*Jul. 2, 2019 aft.*), 1347-57 (*Jul. 2, 2019 eve.*), 1357-62 (*Jul. 2, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

Third Reading — (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve.*), (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

### **Bill 3 — Job Creation Tax Cut (Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment) Act (Toews)**

First Reading — 111 (*May 28, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 236 (*May 29, 2019 eve.*), 341-53 (*Jun. 4, 2019 morn.*), 408-16 (*Jun. 4, 2019 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — (*Jun. 5, 2019 eve.*), (*Jun. 11, 2019 morn.*), 685-700 (*Jun. 11, 2019 aft.*), 738-45 (*Jun. 12, 2019 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — (*Jun. 12, 2019 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 28, 2019; SA 2019 c5 ]

### **Bill 4 — Red Tape Reduction Act (Hunter)**

First Reading — 202 (*May 29, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 277-78 (*May 30, 2019 aft.*), 365-75 (*Jun. 4, 2019 aft.*), 432-48 (*Jun. 5, 2019 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 633-44 (*Jun. 10, 2019 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 644-46 (*Jun. 10, 2019 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 28, 2019; SA 2019 cR-8.2 ]

### **Bill 5 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2019 (\$) (Toews)**

First Reading — 779 (*Jun. 12, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 986 (*Jun. 19, 2019 aft.*), (*Jun. 25, 2019 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1135-36 (*Jun. 24, 2019 eve.*), 1153 (*Jun. 24, 2019 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1195 (*Jun. 25, 2019 eve., adjourned*), 1213 (*Jun. 25, 2019 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 28, 2019; SA 2019 c4 ]

**Bill 6 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2019 (\$)** (Toews)

First Reading — 931 (*Jun. 18, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 984-86 (*Jun. 19, 2019 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1136-38 (*Jun. 24, 2019 eve.*), 1153 (*Jun. 24, 2019 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1195-98 (*Jun. 25, 2019 eve.*), 1213 (*Jun. 25, 2019 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 28, 2019; SA 2019 c3 ]

**Bill 7 — Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019 (Madu)**

First Reading — 356-57 (*Jun. 4, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 625-31 (*Jun. 10, 2019 aft.*), 653-60 (*Jun. 11, 2019 morn.*), 701-07 (*Jun. 11, 2019 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 811-13 (*Jun. 13, 2019 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1138-45 (*Jun. 24, 2019 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 28, 2019; SA 2019 c6 ]

**Bill 8 — Education Amendment Act, 2019 (LaGrange)**

First Reading — 421 (*Jun. 5, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 648-49 (*Jun. 10, 2019 eve.*), 707-25 (*Jun. 11, 2019 eve.*), 781-95 (*Jun. 12, 2019 eve.*), 848-74 (*Jun. 17, 2019 eve.*), 1145-53 (*Jun. 24, 2019 eve.*), 1153-62 (*Jun. 24, 2019 eve.*), 1180-86 (*Jun. 25, 2019 aft.*), 1255-57 (*Jun. 26, 2019 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1258-59 (*Jun. 26, 2019 eve.*), 1266-78 (*Jun. 26, 2019 eve.*), 1375-83 (*Jul. 3, 2019 aft.*), (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve.*), (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve.*), (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

Third Reading — (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

**Bill 9 — Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act (Toews)**

First Reading — (*Jun. 13, 2019, passed on division*)

Second Reading — 874-84 (*Jun. 17, 2019 eve.*), (*Jun. 17, 2019 eve.*), 933-71 (*Jun. 18, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 971 (*Jun. 18, 2019 eve.*), 1004-76 (*Jun. 19, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

Third Reading — (*Jun. 19, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 28, 2019; SA 2019 cP-41.7 ]

**Bill 10 — Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2019 (Toews)**

First Reading — (*Jun. 13, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 847-48 (*Jun. 17, 2019 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 971 (*Jun. 18, 2019 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1138 (*Jun. 24, 2019 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2019 c2 ]

**Bill 11 — Fair Registration Practices Act (Copping)**

First Reading — 975 (*Jun. 19, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1186-94 (*Jun. 25, 2019 aft.*), 1244-51 (*Jun. 26, 2019 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1259-63 (*Jun. 26, 2019 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1263-65 (*Jun. 26, 2019 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2019 cF-1.5 ]

**Bill 12 — Royalty Guarantee Act (Savage)**

First Reading — 1088 (*Jun. 20, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1186 (*Jun. 25, 2019 aft.*), 1251-53 (*Jun. 26, 2019 aft.*), 1255 (*Jun. 26, 2019 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1257-58 (*Jun. 26, 2019 eve.*), 1292-1293 (*Jun. 27, 2019 aft.*), 1393-94 (*Jul. 3, 2019 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

**Bill 13\* — Alberta Senate Election Act (Schweitzer)**

First Reading — 1225 (*Jun. 26, 2019 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1292 (*Jun. 27, 2019 aft.*), 1345-47 (*Jul. 2, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1383-93 (*Jul. 3, 2019 aft.*), (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve.*), (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve.*), (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — (*Jul. 3, 2019 eve., passed on division*)

**Bill 201\* — Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act (Armstrong-Homeniuk)**

First Reading — 277 (*May 30, 2019 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), (*Jun. 13, 2019 aft., reported to Assembly*)

Second Reading — 825-38 (*Jun. 17, 2019 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1122-24 (*Jun. 24, 2019 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1124-26 (*Jun. 24, 2019 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 28, 2019 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force January 1, 2020; SA 2019 cP-30.6 ]

**Bill 202 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2019 (Ellis)**

First Reading — 277 (*May 30, 2019 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), (*Jun. 13, 2019 aft., reported to Assembly*)

Second Reading — 838-40 (*Jun. 17, 2019 aft.*), 1115-22 (*Jun. 24, 2019 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1126 (*Jun. 24, 2019 aft., adjourned*)

**Bill 203 — An Act to Protect Public Health Care (Feehan)**

First Reading — (*Jun. 13, 2019 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), (*Jun. 27, 2019 aft., reported to Assembly*)

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