



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, June 2, 2020

Day 24

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 2, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

Ministerial Statements

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

Economic Relaunch and Workplace Health and Safety

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and speak about the work being done to help keep Albertans safe as we move forward with the relaunch of our economy. These are challenging times, and while the last couple of months have been difficult for many, I want to assure you that we are doing everything we can to keep employees and all Albertans safe as more businesses operate and continue to reopen.

I want to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, the tremendous efforts of employees and job creators during this time who are providing critical services to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 160,000 workplaces in Alberta, many of which continued to operate over the last few months, during the first wave of the COVID outbreak. Although not perfect, thanks to the great work of employees and employers, there have been less than 45 outbreaks, the vast majority of which have been contained, so I would like to thank the employees and job creators for being diligent and ensuring health and safety in the workplace.

I also want to acknowledge the efforts of Alberta's occupational health and safety officers during this unprecedented time. OH and S officers have gone above and beyond to fulfill their regular duties while also dealing with the unique circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the public health emergency was declared, my department has fielded over 3,200 calls assisting workers and employers in limiting the spread of COVID-19. OH and S officers have also conducted more than 2,000 inspections, all with the goal of ensuring that proper mitigation is in place to protect Albertans and employees.

Occupational health and safety officers conduct inspections of workplaces to determine that the controls are in place to promote a healthy and safe workplace. They also promote education and awareness of COVID-related hazards and control measures. These include physical distancing, personal protective equipment, and sanitation and cleaning processes. Please note, Mr. Speaker, that OH and S officers work closely with Alberta Health and other agencies in the event of an outbreak to contain it as quickly as possible, and inspectors will continue to visit work sites to ensure the measures that have been put in place continue to be effective.

Now, under the OH and S Act employees and employers have an obligation to work together to ensure the safety of the workplace. This includes identifying risks and putting in place measures to

mitigate those risks. In addition, many workplaces have occupational health and safety committees, so as we go through the relaunch, Mr. Speaker, I urge employers, employees, and their representatives to continue to work together to put in place measures to address COVID-19 in the workplace in accordance with the advice from our chief medical officer of health.

To assist, guidelines and resources have been made available through the alberta.ca/bizconnect website. This includes guidance concerning the health and safety of workers, best practices, and specific guidelines for a number of workplaces and industries. Resources are also available, Mr. Speaker, through the occupational health and safety website at alberta.ca/OHS.

Now, I understand, Mr. Speaker, that there are some organizations, like the Alberta Federation of Labour, that don't want us to reopen this quickly or even at all, but how can we listen to what Gil McGowan, president of the NDP-affiliated AFL, says when he calls parents who want to put their kids in charter or faith-based learning environments nutbars?

Mr. Speaker, we are focused on reopening safely, and we ask employers and employees to work together to identify the risks, put a plan in place so we continue to move safely through our relaunch. Employers want to reopen, employees want to get back to work, and Albertans want to use these services.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to provide an update to the Assembly as we relaunch our economy in a safe and healthy manner. Our focus is the health and safety of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition has chosen to respond on behalf of the opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that having been elected in March 2008, it is just in the last two days that I have seen this new development of ministers of the Crown getting up and addressing the House with ministerial statements without giving any notice to the Official Opposition or providing us with a copy in advance of their ministerial statements. This is a terrible and unfortunate breach of a convention that has been in place for as long as I have been in this Assembly. I'm not entirely sure why it's happening, but I will say that it certainly does not demonstrate good faith. That being said, I will attempt to respond to the ministerial statement that I have just heard. I will do so off the top of my head.

Let me begin by saying that like the UCP government, we too want to congratulate Albertans and public service workers for the great work that they have been able to do in terms of keeping each other and people safe by respecting physical distancing rules where they can and taking these issues seriously. That is a good thing.

However, I'd also like to add that earlier, at the very outset of this pandemic, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods rose and asked the minister who just gave a statement whether he would consider hiring more health and safety inspectors in order to deal with the extremely elevated levels of procedures and protocols that were going to be needed in every workplace in order to keep people safe. The reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is because what we know is that as much as individuals, when we are at home or in our neighbourhood or with our friends or our families or out on the street or wherever, will individually make the choice to follow the rules that the chief medical officer of health puts out there for us, what we also know is that legally the employer controls the work site, and the employer controls the workplace. Individuals cannot make those decisions if the employer insists on maintaining work procedures that prevent them from making safe decisions.

How do we know that's true? Well, the classic, the unfortunate example that we saw in our meat-packing plants, where we have the unfortunate position of being home to the single biggest workplace COVID-19 outbreak on the continent, where the concerns that were raised by workers were consistently ignored and it was only about 30 days into it that they were given safety. This minister needs to do better. This government needs to do better. Going forward, we must keep our workers safe in their workplaces.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

COVID-19 and Seniors

Ms Sigurdson: The first week of June is Seniors' Week in Alberta. This special week creates opportunities to celebrate seniors in our communities. However, this year is like no other. COVID-19 has stopped many of the planned events.

This week is also an opportunity to focus on seniors and what can be done to improve their lives here in Alberta. Although we have known for some time there have been issues in continuing care, the pandemic has revealed them even more: 76 per cent of the COVID-19 deaths in Alberta have been in continuing care facilities; 109 seniors have died. Each one of these deaths is a tragedy. Family members, friends, and staff all grieve for their loss. We as fellow citizens are troubled and saddened by these preventable deaths.

Most disturbing of all is the Premier's cavalier attitude to this tragedy. Last week he said that since Albertans' average life expectancy is 82 years and the COVID-19 average death rate is 83, Alberta is doing well. What is the Premier suggesting here? Are Albertans over 82 expendable? Like many Albertans, I have parents living in a continuing care facility: mom is 83; dad is 90. Their lives are precious to me. This UCP government needs to act in accordance with valuing seniors, regardless of their age, by protecting the sacredness of life, especially during Seniors' Week.

They need to commit to a public inquiry into continuing care facilities and fully co-operate with the national one. We know that some facilities have been successful in ensuring the health and well-being of their residents while others have not. We need to fully understand the situation through a public inquiry so we have a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

Mr. Speaker, the governing party of this Assembly may choose to benefit from federal bailouts while ignoring thousands of Albertans, but it is the duty of all members of this Assembly to stand up and demand better for seniors in this province.

1:40

Pride Month

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, freedom is a principle that forms the bedrock of Alberta's identity. It's a principle that continues to guide Albertans every day, and it's what makes our province a safe place for all to live and love freely. June is Pride Month, a time when we honour the courageous LGBTQIA2S-plus Albertans and their allies who fought discrimination so that today we can celebrate in a province where all are free to be themselves and love who they choose.

The LGBTQIA2S-plus community contributes immeasurably to the fabric of our country. Their freedom and right to love is why Canada serves as a beacon of hope to those who suffer and sometimes perish under oppressive regimes. This community makes our province a better place, and our governments will always uphold their freedom and dignity. Pride Month is also about teaching understanding and Pride history and to foster movement forward in equality. Pride Month also asks all to acknowledge how damaging homophobia and transphobia were and still are today.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, Pride Month 2020 will not include the usual celebrations and gatherings. Many Pride events have been postponed or cancelled, but the celebrations will continue on Zoom and other interactive media, keeping people connected safely.

We recognize that while Pride Month is a time for Albertans to celebrate the progress of this beautiful community, it is also a time for us to reflect on how we must continue to do more to ensure that every Albertan is treated equally. This Pride Month we ask Albertans to join us in considering how we can build a more inclusive province where everyone is free and safe to be themselves.

To our LGBTQIA2S-plus community: you are seen, you are heard, you are loved.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has a statement to make.

Driver Training and Road Tests

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the public health advice from Alberta's chief medical officer we have seen many government services cancelled or postponed in response to COVID-19. Driver training and road tests are among those services. Obtaining a driver's licence is essential, especially in rural Alberta. There are no buses, the only LRT is to illegally hop a freight train, and it would take days to walk to town. How are people to get to work, grocery stores, or obtain medical services without a driver's licence? Why are examiners not providing tests?

Mr. Speaker, I believe this could be done during a global pandemic. This can be done safely. Protocols for road tests could include wearing masks, disinfectant between exams, and anyone with symptoms must wait 14 days. One constituent says, and I quote: as parents of twin daughters we want to ensure they are properly instructed and have enrolled them for that reason. He continues to say: I have no issues with them being with the instructor as proper precautions take place; the car is sanitized, masks are worn, and so forth. End of quote.

There's no longer a compelling reason why instructors and examiners cannot resume this essential service. I trust that our relevant officials will permit driver training and examinations immediately. We have young people and supporters of families who want to get a job or already have a job but cannot get to work because they cannot get a licence. I would like to know: are examiners getting paid while they are not working?

We saw the dismantling of the road-testing program from the previous government. Now, due to COVID-19 we may see an even larger backlog of road tests that need to be completed. If private instructors or government examiners cannot go back to work, constituents ask why. I ask the government to, if necessary, immediately hire others who will so that we can avoid a worse road test disaster than last year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Child Care

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday one of my children returned to child care for the first time since the pandemic. This was a difficult decision for us. My daughter was deeply missing her social connections, but we weren't planning on sending her back so soon. However, we were told that with limited spaces available right now, a spot may not exist when we needed it.

Child care centres are struggling to stay afloat since many of them, unlike this government, don't have a loophole to exploit to access federal supports.

Like many parents, we have concerns about our daughter's return to daycare, Mr. Speaker, but my family has absolute confidence in our child care centre. I speak with them regularly and see the great work they're doing to implement the guidelines properly. My family's experience and that of our child care centre is not unique. Some parents are ready to return their children to child care so that they can work or run their business; some parents with children or family with pre-existing health conditions aren't ready. Some don't have a choice. If they have to work, they need child care. Some parents of children with disabilities can no longer find appropriate care, and many can no longer afford child care because they've lost their jobs or their income.

Across this sector there's not only one story. Some centres were eager and ready to start up right away. Some can't afford to open up with limited capacity. Some may be permanently closed. Some are able to implement the new health and safety regulations while others find it challenging. Some educators are eager to get back to the work and the kids that they love while others have their own families and health concerns to worry about.

This is a challenging time for child care. The sector was already reeling from multiple cuts to grants, the abrupt cancellation of accreditation, and a minister so fixated on partisan and ideological hits on the opposition and ELCC centres that she seems to have forgotten that she is responsible now for affordable, accessible, and quality child care in Alberta. She has no plan to do that. Every reputable economist in Canada is calling for child care as the key component of our economic recovery. This government seems content to apply Band-Aids to a crisis and then sit back and watch the child care system collapse. Alberta families, children, and the sector deserve better, and our economy needs it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

High School Graduation 2020

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, 2020 has already been an extremely challenging year. As we move through June, I can't help but think of the students in Alberta who will be graduating this year. In the interest of public health safety, graduation ceremonies have been cancelled. This is a necessary precaution but, nonetheless, disappointing for our graduating students.

I want to address those students directly and say that you've achieved something remarkable. Ceremony or not, your hard work and dedication are recognized. You made a choice to commit to your education and your future, and I'm so proud of you. You've endured many sleepless nights of studying, managed your time to hand in assignments, and survived numerous final exams over the years. In addition, you have now had to navigate an entire semester virtually. Never before have the bonds of teacher and student been stretched in such a fashion. As a 30-year teacher I truly understand the unique circumstances you have overcome, and I congratulate both yourselves and your teachers for your diligence and your commitment to learning. You have gained skills and knowledge that will last you a lifetime and have become part of your school's community along the way.

You are just as worthy of a celebration as every graduating class that has come before you. I know how incredibly discouraging it must feel not being able to celebrate the completion of your studies with your peers, yet I hope you've enjoyed the creative responses your schools have had throughout my constituency, like placing congratulation messages on your front lawns to lining the main

street with your graduation pictures. It takes perseverance and willpower to make it to graduation, and you should feel proud for finishing what you started. Even in these unprecedented circumstances you have managed to pull through, and that in itself is no small feat.

Congratulations to the graduating class of 2020. You are truly remarkable.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, let's play a guessing game and take a trip down memory lane. In January 2015 who said, "You have a strange definition of democracy if it involves compelling people to finance political parties against their will"? Or how about in May 2016: "I fought for years to cut taxpayer funding of political parties. Delighted we got it done!"? Sounds like a promise made by – you guessed it – Alberta's current Premier, the leader of the UCP. But what did he actually do? This spring he compelled people to finance his political party against their will by exploiting a loophole in a federal program intended to help nonprofits like the food bank and the Canadian Cancer Society. The UCP is the only governing provincial party to force taxpayers to give them a handout. That's a promise broken.

Let's go to March 2019. There will be no cuts to education under a UCP government: again a quote, again a promise made by the leader of the UCP. But what's the truth, Mr. Speaker? There were education cuts in both UCP budgets. A broken promise.

1:50

Let's go to March of this year. Quote: school authorities will receive their full allotment of funding for the 2019-2020 school year. That's the Education minister. She made that promise on behalf of the UCP and the Premier, and then two weeks later: promise broken; \$128 million cut from schools, resulting in more than 20,000 layoffs, in fact, the largest single-day layoff in Alberta history. She said that there just weren't enough public dollars to keep these education workers supporting students, but apparently there's plenty to keep partisan staff supporting her. That's shameful, Mr. Speaker, taking taxpayer dollars for partisan purposes without taxpayers' consent.

The Premier knows it's wrong. It's too bad he has drifted so far from the principles he once claimed. It's clear that kids and education workers don't matter to him as much as letting party staff live large on the backs of jobless Albertans. UCP promise broken.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition has the call.

Commercial Tenant Rent Relief for Small Business

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Small businesses are struggling. Many can't make rent, and many are worried they will be evicted. Now, the so-called provincial-federal commercial rent program is so utterly broken that property owners are refusing to participate. That's why we called for a ban on commercial evictions until this is sorted out. Simple really, but as usual the Premier is ragging the puck, launching a survey with no end date while his minister's staff complain that a ban is, quote, legally difficult. When will the Premier stand up, do the hard work, and protect Alberta's businesses?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the direct financial support given by the government of Alberta to small and medium-sized businesses exceeds that on a per capita basis of all but one of the 10 provinces. We have been leaders in providing financial security through this incredibly challenging time for both families and job creators. Just one measure alone: \$320 million, I think, assumed by the government in Workers' Compensation Board premiums. We are working with small-business organizations to see what more can be done, particularly on the challenging issue of commercial tenants, and I'd be happy to speak more to that in a moment.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really not that difficult. Nova Scotia already has a ban, and B.C. passed one yesterday saying, "We heard from small businesses that they need us to help fill a gap that has left some of them unable to get the support they need. We're listening to small businesses and have their backs." Now, this Premier knows that Alberta's economy is under more stress than almost anywhere else, so Alberta's small businesses more than anywhere else deserve a Premier who has their backs. He knows what he needs to do. What is he waiting for? Ban commercial evictions.

Mr. Kenney: Well, when it comes to supporting small businesses, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the Assembly that the very first act of this government was the carbon tax repeal act, which saved thousands of dollars for the average small business, a cost that had been imposed by the previous NDP government. Commercial landlords would be foolhardy to evict tenants during this time when we expect to see a regrettable wave of business failures. It makes absolutely no sense, which is why we've committed \$67 million to support in a cost-shared approach with the federal government fiscal support for small and medium-sized businesses through . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows that program is broken, but, you know, when it comes to his own ideological agenda, this Premier can't act quick enough. A \$4.7 billion corporate handout: get 'er done. Firing 20,000 special-needs teaching assistants: do it on the weekend if you can. Attacking doctors in a pandemic: what could possibly go wrong? Using taxpayer dollars to subsidize UCP fundraisers: sign him up. But when it comes to supporting Alberta's small businesses with their rent: silence. Premier, when will you start taking action instead of just taking your time?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, within a day of the federal announcement of the cost-shared rent assistance program for commercial tenants, this government announced a full commitment of \$67 million, the maximum permissible under that program. We are working with the government of Canada and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business to address administrative shortcomings in that program, and we continue to listen closely to the job creators in this province, who are very glad to see that the NDP is no longer sitting on this side of the House.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy

Ms Notley: John Horgan, Doug Ford, Scott Moe, François Legault, English, French, left, right: it doesn't matter. Everyone gets why in the middle of a pandemic when businesses can't get access to federal dollars, the Premier's party sidling up for their share demonstrates a profound lapse in ethical judgment. Even the CTF, with which this Premier has some history, says that "the UCP is like

a rich guy going to a soup kitchen." Is the Premier really comfortable telling out-of-work Albertans whom he's not helping that he's meanwhile going to take their tax dollars for his party fundraisers?

The Speaker: I will provide some caution to the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to asking about matters of party business. However, if the Premier chooses to respond, he's welcome to do so.

Mr. Kenney: I don't even know what the question was there, just a typical diatribe. I wonder: how often do they rehearse these things, Mr. Speaker? They should just put it on autoplay every day: division and deception and anger. When it comes to support for small businesses, Alberta's per capita actions announced to date amount to \$140 per person compared to \$63 in Saskatchewan, \$42 in Ontario, and \$50 in Quebec. We're leading, as usual, when it comes to supporting job creators.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier again suggested that it was okay for his party to take federal dollars because he had stopped fund raising. Unfortunately, that's not true. On March 30, when parents were condemning the firing of 20,000 EAs, when 800 doctors asked him to cancel his attack on health care, when the virus spread in what Dr. Hinshaw called one of the hardest days yet, the UCP said to Albertans: give us money, quote, so that we can keep the lights on in these tough times. Would the Premier like to rise now and correct the record and apologize to this House for the inaccurate statement he gave yesterday?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: I provided the Leader of the Opposition some caution. She's a very accomplished parliamentarian. She understands how to make these questions about government policy. That certainly wasn't one. But the leader of the government, the Premier, is welcome to respond should he choose to do so. If he wouldn't like to, I'm happy to move on to the third question.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (continued)

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course, as usual, the preamble of the Leader of the Opposition's comment is totally inaccurate. I said that we suspended fundraising immediately when the COVID outbreak occurred, which is true. We have made a few requests since then but not like the NDP, which on March 17, the day a public health emergency was declared, sent out a begging e-mail to their members seeking to monetize a pandemic. That tells you all you need to know. By the way, they are also one and the same with the federal NDP, which together with most political parties in Canada is participating in the nonprofit wage subsidy program.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the UCP, the other parties that this Premier is talking about are not saying to their citizens that it's okay to fire 20,000 educational assistants whose job it is to teach special-needs students, that it's okay to go after rural doctors, that it's okay to not pay people their emergency isolation benefits, that that's okay because we need to do more with less, and then turn around and take taxpayer dollars from Albertans who can't get a job. That's why this is a government question because Albertans deserve consistency, not hypocrisy. Why can't they get that?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, as partisan rants go, they're getting worse and worse over there. First of all, I want to remind

the NDP. They talk about the largest single-day layoff in Alberta history. That would be every single year that the NDP was in office. When the school year was over, exactly the same people in the education system were laid off because the classrooms were no longer open. Regrettably, because of the largest pandemic in over a century the classrooms were closed in this province in mid-March. We continue to provide online education, including for children with disabilities. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View is the only one with the call.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, one of my proudest moments as an MLA was introducing the NDP's first bill to get big money out of politics. What this bill prohibits is donations by an entity other than a person who is ordinarily resident in Alberta. A contribution is defined very broadly and includes any money taken by a political party without compensation. I believe the federal wage subsidy taken by this Premier for his political bills is a clear violation of the act. To the Premier: did you consult with Elections Alberta before taking Trudeau's handout?

2:00

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate to see the NDP continuing to disregard your point, which is that they're asking questions that are not about government policy. But if the NDP wants to talk about big money in politics, let's talk about all the money they take from their union supporters, including their union boss Gil McGowan, who called Albertans nutbars just the other day. That member and her party still have not stood up in the House and condemned that behaviour. Maybe they will now. I don't know. I do think it's time. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. You might not like the answer, but I am entitled to hear the answer, and the hon. Government House Leader was giving one.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, my point is that if they want to talk about party policy, maybe they should answer for the behaviour of one of the people that's in charge of the very NDP Party that's inside this House, Gil McGowan, who called Albertans who want to home-school their kids nutbars. Will they condemn that? Yes or no?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, generally when matters of illegal campaign contributions arise, they are referred to the Election Commissioner. Now, this government has fired the Election Commissioner with a bill they rammed through this House in a matter of days. That commissioner was already investigating this Premier when he was terminated. We have no word on whether those investigations continue. To the Premier: are you unconcerned about taking these illegal contributions because you know you fired the last person who held you accountable?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: I think I've been fairly generous with the swath of latitude that I've allowed the members of the Official Opposition to ask questions specifically about party operations. I've been a member of the opposition. I am very, very familiar with how it's possible to make questions about government business. If the hon. member chooses not to do that, we will move on.

I will provide the opportunity for the government to respond.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (continued)

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is another example of the NDP trying to avoid problems with their own party. When that hon. member and her colleagues brought forward bogus complaints against the Premier and other people in this Chamber, complaints that the Ethics Commissioner then cleared the Premier and other members of this Chamber for, the Ethics Commissioner also brought forward concerns about that member and her party contradicting or attacking independent officers of this Legislature, including the Chief Electoral Officer. So my question for the opposition is: are they going to apologize for that behaviour to independent officers of this Legislature? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. This is a prime example of what happens when we don't discuss government policy. The decorum in the House is likely to degrade to levels that none of us should be proud of.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I will be more than happy to interject if you don't make this question about government policy.

Ms Ganley: Absolutely. The spirit and intent of that act, which I understand the government supports, is to create a level playing field for Elections Alberta. I maintain that the donation is illegal and must be paid back. However, I certainly maintain that it is blatantly hypocritical for a government whose policy is to ignore the concerns and needs of countless Albertans during the COVID-19 pandemic to take Justin Trudeau's handout. To the Premier. Here and now, it's time to pay back the money. Will you?

The Speaker: Much, much better.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's no more a donation than a staffer receiving an EI payment from the government. The whole question is absolutely ridiculous. But, again, if the hon. member wants to talk about the Ethics Commissioner and the process of independent officers of this Legislature, my question: are they going to finally apologize to this House? They were condemned by the Ethics Commissioner for their abuse of independent officers of this Legislature. I see the Leader of the Official Opposition smiling about that. I don't think it's a laughing matter. Will she finally apologize for the way that she treated the Ethics Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer of this province?

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Manitoba government saw the light and reversed its plan to impose deep cuts onto postsecondary institutions. Furthermore, Manitoba said that they will help schools adapt to the new reality stemming from the pandemic with an emergency fund of more than \$25 million. When will this Premier of this province acknowledge this new reality here in Alberta and commit to properly funding institutions, hiring back the instructors and support staff that we need to get our colleges and universities back on track?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the member opposite hasn't been paying attention, so I'd be happy to give him an update. Of course, our government is providing adequate flexibility for our postsecondary institutions. As the member knows, hopefully, we were scheduled to introduce a new performance-based funding

model on April 1 and have since delayed that because the priority needs to be on responding to the pandemic and, most importantly of all, of course, ensuring that our students are able to complete the semester. We're providing that flexibility to our institutions, indeed.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, that's funny, Mr. Speaker. Two budgets from this government, and two times they made deep cuts to postsecondary education.

Let's take a look at another province. In Ontario the government there recognized the uncertainty facing postsecondary, and they shelved their performance-based funding model. Meanwhile, here at home the UCP insists on imposing performance-based funding, which defies common sense, given the dramatic developments of the last three months. As the minister said, performance-based funding was delayed end of April, end of May, now the end of June. Why does this Premier stick stubbornly to this plan that universities don't want . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite unfortunately doesn't have the updated information, so I would encourage him to do a little bit more homework. We are working with our postsecondary institutions to ensure a proper rollout of our performance-based funding model.

He brought up Ontario, and if he wants to make some comparisons, I'm happy to. It's important to recognize that the University of Alberta, for example, receives almost the same dollar amount of funding from their provincial government as the University of Toronto, and the latter, Mr. Speaker, has over 50,000 more students. I am confident that we can deliver a more efficient system, and we absolutely will.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, it's irresponsible to be in charge of our postsecondary institutions and constantly push for more cuts, more cuts, and more cuts. Albertans deserve better. Our students deserve better, too, and we need all hands on deck. This Premier takes taxpayers' money from political operations. We had at the same time more than 3,500 postsecondary staff being laid off across this province, 3,500 and counting. When will this Premier commit to allocating emergency funding, like other provinces did, so our Alberta colleges and universities can open safely like other . . .

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's not just my opinion that we can indeed do better and restructure our postsecondary system. The incoming president of the University of Alberta has put a plan on the table to restructure the university, realize over \$120 million in savings, and at the same time drive towards an ambitious goal of increasing enrolment by 25 per cent. That is the plan that they are operating off, and we commend them for their leadership in looking at their efficiencies. By their own accord they have noted that their institution is expensive and isn't delivering the results that students and Albertans expect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has a question to ask.

Rural Crime

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP many communities in rural Alberta saw dramatic increases in break-ins, property and vehicle thefts, assaults, and violence against women.

They were so negligent that *Maclean's* magazine reported that 7 out of 10 cities with the highest increases in crime in all of Canada over the previous five years were here in Alberta. Rural Albertans deserve a justice system that makes them feel secure and protected. What is this government doing to combat the increase in rural crime and to support constituents' concerns for safety?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We've heard from thousands and thousands of frustrated Albertans. They've been victimized over and over again, living in fear in their communities. They fear when somebody drives down their dirt road. This government has heard them and taken action. We brought in enhanced restitution powers to go after those that have victimized them. We brought in community impact statements so they can have their voice heard as a community in court, to get stronger penalties. We also enacted the scrap metal dealers act. While the NDP sat on their hands for four years not enacting this, we proclaimed it.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, in my constituency I have heard about response times that can be as long as two hours or, tragically, sometimes not at all because distances are great and detachments are few. The NDP did not allocate sufficient resources to combat rural crime. What is this government doing to improve response times and RCMP presence to ensure rural Albertans regain confidence in the justice system?

2:10

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we heard this as well. Albertans want to know someone is coming when they call. The response times in rural Alberta when we came in, sometimes it took the police over an hour to get there. That's why we brought in the RAPID force, to give 400 officers, our sheriffs, our fish and wildlife officers, our commercial vehicle officers enhanced authority to help deal with emergency situations.

We also entered into a historic new agreement with municipalities, the largest single investment in policing since the March West, Mr. Speaker. This government stands with rural Alberta. They were ignored for four years. This government takes action.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP's mismanagement and soft-on-crime approach too many criminals went through a revolving door, catch-and-release justice system, getting back out onto the streets often within hours and reoffending. There is mounting frustration in rural communities that criminals are being released or that cases against them are being dropped because the NDP underfunded the prosecution service. What is this government doing to stop the revolving door and ensure that criminals are behind bars and not victimizing Albertans?

The Speaker: I know that government members like to remind opposition members when they may be offering a question up with a preamble. Perhaps that was also a good example of a preamble.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, one thing that we heard loud and clear from Albertans is that they don't want a justice system designed in downtown Toronto; they want a justice system built right here in Alberta. That's why this government is so proud to be bringing in legislation to establish an Alberta parole board that will be responsive to the needs of Albertans. Another promise made, promise kept from this government.

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

Support for Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's hypocrisy is offensive, but it's also cruel. At the same time that they're forcing Albertans to subsidize partisan birthday cards to the Premier, they're taking young people aging out of foster care to court to deny them ongoing emotional and financial support. That's right. During a global pandemic the UCP thinks tax dollars are better spent bailing out their fiscally inept political party rather than supporting young adults who've experienced trauma, abuse, and addiction. Will the Minister of Children's Services agree that pursuing this legal action is cruel and heartless, apologize to these young people, and immediately repeal the changes?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, the opposition continues to play politics during a pandemic. As the member opposite knows, I can assure you that in the midst of all of this, this uncertainty, this crisis, young people in government care are being cared for as well as those who have aged out. We've prioritized ensuring that young adults who've had previous involvement through the child intervention system are safe and have the resources they need to manage through these challenging times.

Ms Pancholi: Given that that prioritization of young people aging out of care ends in a few weeks and given that one of the youth involved said that she was worried that the loss of these supports would, quote, force her back into sex work and given that the Court of Queen's Bench granted an injunction against the government's decision to cut these young people off supports and said the government's actions could constitute "cruel and unusual [punishment]" and given that the court stated that irreparable "social, financial, and psychological harm" would result from this government's action, if the Minister of Children's Services won't stand up for these young people, will the Minister of Justice abandon the appeal of this court's decision?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, I can't speak to anything that is before the court, but I will say that in situations where a child is turning 18 or a young adult may be aging out of care, workers will ensure that there is no disruption to the services they are receiving. I also want to point out that our province, through the advancing futures program, has some of the strongest social and emotional supports as well as mentoring opportunities for young adults who do not have those natural supports. We have to continue to do better to transition these young adults out of government care.

Ms Pancholi: Given that once again, Mr. Speaker, the court stated that it was "cruel and unusual [punishment]" and given that, with the exception of this government, Albertans think it's wrong to refuse to support vulnerable youth while happily taking taxpayers' money for the UCP's fundraisers and given that these young people have told us what the cost of losing these supports will be for them and given that pursuing this legal action shows exactly what the Minister of Children's Services and the Minister of Justice think of their responsibilities to these young people, will the Premier explain why he values the paycheques of the UCP staff but not the lives and security of young people trying to start a new life?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have said a number of times, not only have our front-line caseworkers reached out to each and every young adult who may be on this program, we've also reached out to our community partners, who often offer many of the supports that these young adults rely on. No matter what, what we've identified, what we've heard is that we need to do a better job of transitioning these young adults into adulthood and help them find natural supports so that they can succeed in life.

Municipal Funding

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's recovery will be driven by our municipalities. That's why it's so critical that we prevent what Mayor Don Iveson called this week "a municipal financial crisis." The federal government is fast-tracking over \$2 billion to support municipalities, but the UCP has been silent except when they are helping themselves to pandemic relief funds to bail out their party office. Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs commit that the province will match this federal contribution to our municipal governments?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are looking at almost \$1 billion in MSI funding to municipalities this year alone. This includes almost \$200 million in local infrastructure funding for Edmonton and more than \$250 million in local infrastructure funding for Calgary. The government of Alberta is also making over \$3.25 billion in capital commitment to Edmonton and approximately \$4 billion for Calgary. We are working with our municipalities.

Member Ceci: Given that the UCP has actually cut police funding, grants in place of taxes and are taking a higher percentage of municipal fine revenue and given that they're making these cuts while having their hands stuck out looking to get their party fundraising subsidized by taxpayers, will the Minister of Municipal Affairs commit to restoring all municipal funding for the duration of this pandemic, and will he and his cabinet colleagues even pretend to care about municipalities as much as they care about their party fundraisers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This side of the aisle is working every single day, every single week among our municipal partners. In fact, we continue to have weekly town halls with our municipal partners to make sure that both the municipal government and the provincial government are working together to tackle the consequences of this COVID-19 pandemic. We are doing what our municipalities are asking of us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Thank you. Given that the Premier of Ontario has committed to supporting municipalities in his province and to working with the federal government and given that the UCP has so far only committed to working with the federal government when it comes to securing funding for their party staffers and given that the mayor of Edmonton has warned that without support from both the province and the federal government a municipal financial crisis could occur, will the minister follow the lead of the Premier of Ontario and commit to working with the feds to help Albertans and not just UCP staff?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps that member opposite over there would have to apologize for the comment made by the president of the AFL, who, by the way, has got two voting interests on the NDP board, including every member of the affiliated AFL.

We are working with the federal government and my colleagues across the province to make sure that we're all on the same page, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Rural Physicians

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the main issues that many rural ridings, my riding included, have been facing is the attracting and retention of rural doctors. This has been an issue that has existed for a long time, not just in Alberta but in Canada. However, on April 24 the Minister of Health announced the most generous funding package in all of Canada to address this issue. To the Minister of Health: can the minister update this House on the impact of this unprecedented support for our rural physicians?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. I'm pleased to say that the announcement on April 24 means that Alberta now has the most generous incentives in Canada for physicians to practise in rural communities. We've seen physicians in several communities reverse decisions to change their practices, and we hope we'll see more. Alberta remains the best place in Canada to practise medicine, and our government is committed to keeping it that way. I'm hopeful that rural physicians will choose to continue to serve the patients and their communities, including their local hospitals.

The Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the update.

Given that about 20 per cent of Alberta's population is rural and given that this constitutes nearly 874,000 Albertans, rural physicians undoubtedly play an invaluable role in the health and safety of many Alberta citizens. Given that sometimes these doctors go unrecognized for their efforts, to the same minister: would you be able to elaborate on the importance of rural physician retention as well as the crucial role they play?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member notes and many others have noted, rural physician recruitment and retention is a significant challenge for us here in Alberta, and I certainly appreciate the unique nature of rural medicine. Long hours on call, less central supports, extra training in services like anaesthesia and obstetrics: these are some of the unique challenges for our rural physicians. I recognize the anxiety in rural Alberta around access to health care. That's why we've committed to no rural hospital closures and introduced the most generous incentives in Canada for rural practice.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister, for your recognition and commitment to rural physicians.

Given that when the NDP were in government, negotiations with the AMA resulted in the termination of nearly \$50 million in retention benefit for physicians and given that the AMA agreed to terminate this benefit in exchange for being designated the exclusive representative of physicians and given that I along with my rural colleagues have consistently heard from many of our physicians that they don't feel properly represented by the AMA, to the minister: why is the AMA denying their own members their right to represent and speak for themselves?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's correct that the AMA is designated as the exclusive representative of physicians. I certainly heard frustration from some physicians about this. It's clear to me that physicians are willing to do their part to contain costs. It's also clear that to this date the AMA has shown no credible commitment to meeting our priority of holding our physician spending at a current level. In the coming weeks I'll be reviewing whether there are alternate ways to negotiate with physicians, and I welcome feedback from physicians directly on this topic.

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

Keystone XL Pipeline Project

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that our oil industry needs takeaway capacity, and we know we have to do everything we can to support Alberta workers. Two months ago we found out that this government will financially back the Keystone XL project. They are providing up to \$7.5 billion in public dollars to back this project, but the details are unclear, and Albertans deserve to know how their money is being spent. To the minister. We have asked before. Will you finally provide these details?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member opposite just provided the details. We've provided a \$1.2 billion investment in the project plus a loan guarantee. I am really pleased to let this Assembly know that the border crossing for the KXL pipeline across the Canada-U.S. border has been completed, and construction is under way on both sides of the border, creating thousands of jobs here in Canada at a time when it's desperately needed.

Mr. Sabir: Given that since this deal was announced, KXL has faced a legal setback in the courts and presidential candidate Joe Biden has said that he will revoke the permit if elected and given that this project always faced significant legal and political risk and given that Biden's stance on Keystone XL shouldn't come as a surprise, to the minister: did your government conduct any kind of risk analysis on this project? If so, will they commit to providing that analysis to the House today?

Mr. Kenney: Of course we conducted risk analysis, Mr. Speaker. Of course the Crown does not release legal advice for matters that might be under subsequent litigation. Having said that, we know it's unfortunate to have seen Mr. Biden's remarks. What's really bizarre, though, was that the NDP of Alberta openly opposed this same project. In fact, when they first came to office in 2015, they told our representative in Washington to down tools on promoting Keystone XL. The Leader of the Opposition spoke publicly and repeatedly against it. Their federal party went to Washington to lobby against it. Shame on the NDP for undermining the oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not true. We have supported Keystone XL.

Given that Mr. Biden doubled down on his position after the Premier tried to lecture him about the pipeline and given that the Minister of Energy has actually done more harm than good to our international image with her comments about building pipelines during a pandemic and given that these comments will further harm the reputation of the Alberta energy industry and inhibit our ability to attract investment and get our products to market, can the minister retract her comments and also guarantee that Albertans will get their money back if Joe Biden cancels Keystone XL?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I know that Alberta's NDP cheered when they heard those comments from Joe Biden, just as they cheered when Barack Obama vetoed Keystone XL. But Albertans hired this government to get pipelines built, and that's why we took a thoughtful and prudent investment with a preferred equity stake, that's creating 7,400 high-paying jobs when we need them most here north of the border, that's already created the border crossing, creating facts on the ground. We stand as well with the building trades, construction and steelworkers' unions in the United States, all of us together supporting North American energy security.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has a question.

Paid Sick Leave during COVID-19 Pandemic

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the opposition leader and I asked this government to support paid sick leave. Rather than committing to this simple policy, that will keep both workers and communities safe from COVID-19, the minister hemmed and hawed before saying that they would get back to us in the coming weeks. This minister of labour had actually announced paid sick leave in Alberta earlier in the pandemic and failed to deliver. Is the government now ready to deliver on their earlier commitment to introduce a paid sick leave, and if not, why not?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated last week, the announcement was made by the federal government last week, and we're waiting to hear about the details before we move forward on this. But the hon. member is quite right. Our government understood the need that individuals are sometimes caught between a choice of having to stay at home as directed by the chief medical officer or having to go to work. That's why we acted quickly when we put in place the emergency isolation benefit, before the federal benefit could be in place, so that people wouldn't have to make that choice. We acted quickly. We supported Albertans, and we will continue to do so.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you. Given that the support the minister refers to has ended and given that the minister of labour has so far only committed to reviewing proposals and given that the UCP is taking a federal bailout for their partisan political staff but it's radio silence for Alberta workers looking for paid sick leave and given that in B.C. Premier Horgan has stated that their province is prepared to go it alone and create a paid sick leave policy if necessary, is the minister prepared to follow the strong example set by B.C., create

an Alberta paid sick leave policy, or is he only willing to help those who help him fund raise?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as noted by one of my learned colleagues here, \$100 million is not radio silence. We spent that as part of the emergency isolation benefit. That doubled the original budget. We are waiting for details from the federal government. It's unfortunate that they couldn't provide more details earlier, but we are going to be thoughtful about our response, once we see that, and support both Albertans and Alberta job creators during this time.

Ms Gray: Given that businesses and workers are calling for a paid sick leave policy that supports them and given that this minister has been unable to comment on the proposal from the federal government but given that this government operated at breakneck speed to get the federal handout to keep their party organization running and given that Albertans are tired of this government delaying and passing the buck, can the minister at least give us his opinion on whether he thinks Alberta workers should have access to paid sick leave?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As stated, we are working with the federal government. We are going to get more details from them, and then we're going to be able to be thoughtful about our response in terms of supporting both Albertan employees and job creators. We are devoted to assisting Albertans through this. We have already committed to \$13 billion in terms of our response, the highest per capita of any province in the country. We will continue to support Albertans and job creators.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a question to ask.

Federal Firearm Policies

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the federal government moved to abolish the use and possession and trade of over 1,500 firearms in Canada, predominantly modern sporting rifles, large-bore bolt-action rifles, and as well a particular brand of coffee. The reasoning was to attempt to make Canadians safer. However, very few of the legally owned firearms, if any, are used in a crime, and it will cost the taxpayers at least \$600 million to \$1 billion in buyback programs. Instead of focusing on how the illegal firearms are smuggled in and used or strengthening sentencing for gun crimes or increasing border protection services' budget, a paltry \$17.5 million per year, to address the real issue, the Liberals chose to go after the law-abiding citizens. To the Minister of Justice...

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard loud and clear from law-abiding firearms owners how frustrated they are when they were side-swiped by Ottawa on their recent firearms policy. This government is exploring all the options available to us to take greater responsibility here in the province of Alberta when it comes to the management of firearms. We're exploring a chief firearms officer for this province. I believe a motion is going to come to this House for debate. I'm looking forward to that debate. We need more Alberta and less Ottawa.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

2:30

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that section 117.15 states that

in making regulations, the Governor in Council may not prescribe any thing to be a prohibited firearm, a restricted firearm, a prohibited weapon, a restricted weapon, a prohibited device or prohibited ammunition if, in the opinion of the Governor in Council, the thing to be prescribed is reasonable for use in Canada for hunting or sporting purposes

and that the exceptions were made for indigenous citizens for the purpose of hunting, to the minister: would this not indicate that, in the opinion of the Governor in Council, such firearms are reasonable for hunting in Canada and therefore this ban could not have been made under the regulations?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I think that in those 35 seconds more thought has gone into firearms policy than what happened in all of Ottawa. Right now in our province law-abiding Albertans know how to handle their firearms. They're responsible with what they do. If Ottawa was intent on actually dealing with firearms crime, they'd be going after illegal guns coming into our country. Eighty per cent of the illegal firearms used are American guns coming into Canada. When will Ottawa crack down at the border? That's the message we sent to Minister Lametti and Minister Blair when we met with them earlier this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that many Albertans safely own and store these firearms, many of which have been passed down through families and hold sentimental value for many, and that many Albertans, small gun shops, and manufacturers would suffer due to this unreasonable ban, to the minister: how soon can we act on implementing measures to prevent this poorly thought out ban from being enforced in Alberta?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to work with stakeholders to make sure we come up with a clear policy from the province of Alberta. Stay tuned for something here in the near term as to what Alberta's next steps are going to be.

But, again, I think this goes back to my earlier comment about the fact that we need more Alberta and less Ottawa. That's why I'm so proud that this government brought in an Alberta parole board legislation earlier this week, Mr. Speaker. We're going to take decisive action here to stand up for law-abiding Albertans, including our firearms owners.

Support for Disability Workers

Ms Renaud: This government continues to show their real priorities: Albertans on AISH, not worth the \$30 a month that indexing AISH would give them. Ask the UCP, though, and they'll tell you that their party HQ, which apparently couldn't survive on its own fundraising, deserves a federal bailout. Our caucus recently called on the UCP to commit to a \$4-an-hour wage increase for disability workers. We've heard nothing but silence from this minister, so let me try again. Will the minister commit to this wage top-up for disability workers?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Our government is continuing to work with the federal government for greater clarity on the parameters regarding the federal wage top-up program. You know, I like to

point out that we have provided wage top-ups for health care aides, \$2 an hour as announced by the Minister of Health, which has been paid out, and we're continuing to work with our federal government in regard to the overall program. We'll be announcing details in the coming weeks.

Ms Renaud: Given that our caucus called on the UCP to provide and pay for all PPE that disability workers require to safely do their job and that the UCP is exploiting a loophole to take federal bailout money for their party and given that this government is putting their hypocrisy on full display by refusing to give disability workers the salary and tools they need to stay safe while insisting that Albertans struggling in this economic and health crisis fork over hard-earned money so the UCP can keep their partisan operations running, to the minister: have you lost interest in protecting Albertans now that your partisan staff are covered?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. You know, as we hear again, after a couple of days, the NDP coming back into this room, back into this Chamber, let's all take note that it was 2020 when the NDP really and truly jumped over the shark as they keep on taking shots at the CERB program. This is a program that's not unlike the employment insurance program, and the NDP keep on coming back into this Chamber and calling it government handouts and bailouts. It's disrespectful to the workers who are applying for these programs, and I hope that the NDP give their heads a shake and are less shameful.

Ms Renaud: I had a third question, but I'm going to go back and focus on the original one. It was for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Disability workers are doing a great job. That's why infection rates are low in that community. They need PPE. They need it covered. All we want is an answer. They deserve a top-up. They deserve an answer, not just a phrase that says: we might bill you at a later date. Answer the question. Disabled Albertans are watching, as are their workers. Answer the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud that we were the only province in Canada to provide free PPE to businesses that needed it. Over the past few weeks the Provincial Operations Centre made over 5 million deliveries of personal protective equipment to non Alberta Health Services businesses and organizations, and I want to commend them for that work. As we transition towards recovery, we are prioritizing PPE delivery to those at the highest risk of COVID-19 exposure. We are helping connect businesses with PPE vendors and the Biz Connect website.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a question.

COVID-19 and Care Facility Staffing

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. British Columbia has had single-site staffing rules in place for continuing care since April 10. Ontario's rules have been in place since April 22. The Member for Calgary-Acadia told this House last week that Alberta had 100 per cent single-site staffing. Yesterday he admitted that that's not true. What's more, he admitted that some seniors will never be given that protection because he's letting the private facility operators off the hook. Why are Vegreville seniors denied the pandemic protection given to other Alberta seniors?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday when I was asked this very same question by the hon. member, the answer is still the same. We have 400 sites throughout the province. The chief medical officer of health has provided guidance and orders to be able to provide the operators and the staff there with some guidance. In particular, with the single-site provision that was provided to these sites, there were four sites that made an application to Dr. Hinshaw, the chief medical officer of health. The exemption decision is hers alone, and I encourage the NDP to give our medical professionals the deference they deserve.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that Optima Living in Vegreville has been plagued by understaffing and horrific working conditions and given that the facility has been cited for failing to meet accommodation standards 36 times on that member's watch and given that he has still signed off on an \$8-an-hour pay cut for workers there, does the member really think it's a good idea to give this troubled facility permission to ignore a public health order during a pandemic?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member is reading her questions and didn't probably hear my answer for the first question, but I'll repeat it. The exemption decision, the decision of the chief medical officer of health, is an exemption that's provided by the chief medical officer of health. It is not a decision of me or this government, but the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, has provided that exemption to those four sites out of the 400 in the system. I'd encourage the NDP to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that Alberta seniors have been appalled by the Premier's comments that many of those who lost their lives had outlived their life expectancy anyway and given that the Premier has been trying to walk back these vile comments with a promise to, quote, build a wall of defence around the most vulnerable, Premier, why are you compromising the safety of seniors in Vegreville to build a wall of defence around Optima Living's profit margins?

Mr. Shandro: I'm not surprised, Mr. Speaker, to hear again the NDP twist the words of our Premier and to totally and completely misrepresent the words of our Premier when we have done a fantastic job in this province of being able to reply to this pandemic: the testing capacity that we built up to be able to make sure that our public health officials can quickly respond and the fact that we have seen in our province, unfortunately, 106, I think, deaths in our continuing care facilities compared, though, to Ontario and Quebec, which is 1,600 and 2,700. The attacks on these continuing care facilities are unwarranted.

Economic Recovery

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 public health pandemic, a record-low price of oil, and a global recession have created unpredictable times for the future of this province. In response to the above, our government appointed some of the province's brightest minds to an economic recovery council to provide their expertise on how to pivot out of this economic crisis. Given that the statistics and the response from Albertans have put us in a position to re-engage our economy, Albertans are now looking for hope and direction. To the Minister of Finance: when can Albertans expect a report from the economic recovery council, and what strategies do you feel will be the focus of this council?

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

2:40

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We've been holding regular meetings with the economic recovery council, and we're very fortunate to have as advisers these experienced and esteemed individuals dedicated to supporting our province. The council has been providing advice on how to ensure Alberta is well positioned to return to prosperity. Their advice has informed our actions to date and is informing our economic recovery plan, that we'll be releasing in the upcoming weeks.

Mr. Sigurdson: Given that now we are currently under way in phase 1 of our relaunch and looking forward to phase 2 and phase 3 of the province's relaunch strategy and given that as a province we need to establish a focused and fiscally responsible plan that will help relaunch our economy, maximize our provincial investments and infrastructure, and address the balance needs of our small to large industries, to the Minister of Finance: can you provide some insight as to how this government expects to lead a strong economic recovery while staying fiscally responsible?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are of course implementing relief programs and fiscal stimulus measures to support Alberta businesses and Albertans. But I want to be clear: individuals and businesses create wealth and prosperity; governments do not. It's government's role to create the most competitive business environment and see, again, individuals and businesses invest, create wealth, and return this province to prosperity. That is the way we will lead the nation in terms of economic growth and recovery following this COVID pandemic.

Mr. Sigurdson: Given that the relaunch of Alberta's economy will take a co-ordinated effort from all levels of government and given that our Premier has stated that as a province we will get through this together stronger and united, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how does this government intend on ensuring that we address the need for lower taxes, smaller government expenditure, and red tape reduction on all levels, including that of our local municipalities, to ensure the province will lead the country in economic growth?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know municipalities are on the front line of this recovery. Our government is investing billions to help get our communities through the pandemic, and we have made numerous regulatory changes to make it easier for administrations to do their jobs. But we know there is more work to be done. That is why we have worked with councils to get that list of shovel-ready projects for potential infrastructure stimulus. We will have more to say in the days ahead.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will return to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Victims of Crime

Mrs. Allard: I rise in the Assembly today to bring attention to the victims of crime in this province and the challenges they face in their pursuit of justice. I am honoured to serve as co-chair on the victims of crime task force along with my colleague the hon. Member for Airdrie-East. This working group will review the financial benefits program available to victims and consult on the creation of a new victims' assistance model to be launched in 2021. We will be working directly with stakeholders across Alberta to improve supports for victims of crime and ensure the new model provides what victims actually need. I would like to thank those who selflessly volunteer to step into these tragic situations with offers of support when most people would prefer to step back.

For me, this is personal. In 2013, on the night of January 12, dear friends of mine lost their son to a violent crime. Brenda and Jody Wiese received the most dreaded call a parent can imagine as a police officer informed them their son had been stabbed multiple times. Hope faded quickly as they realized their son Brett, just 20 years old at the time, was not going to survive. Along with their daughter Morgan, Brenda and Jody have walked through unimaginable trauma, grief, heartache, and loss since that dreadful night. The family has endured multiple trials and appeals and has been steadfast in their resolve to seek justice for their son and brother. No parent should have to go through the pain of losing a child. No baby sister should wake up to the news that her brother is gone.

I was appalled to see my friends struggle in the depth of their grief to find their way through this legal process day after day and year after year. Brett's loss is a life sentence, one the Wiese family had no choice in and one they are faced with each and every morning. I was appalled to sit in court with them and witness the taxpayer-funded professional support afforded to the now convicted murderers while my friends were largely on their own. They were left to figure out the path forward with limited guidance and no clear supports.

We can do better, Mr. Speaker, and we will do better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Sherwood Park has risen with a member's statement.

Chuba Hubbard

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sherwood Park is a community that is home to many accomplished citizens, and today I want to celebrate the success of one of our own. Chuba Hubbard, born in Alberta in 1999, took 19 out of the 20 first-place votes to win the Jon Cornish trophy as the best Canadian in the NCAA football for the 2019 season. Hubbard, who wears number 30 on the field, is an explosive running back for Oklahoma State. He topped the NCAA in 2019 and became the 32nd running back in NCAA history to surpass the 2,000 yards rushing mark. Hubbard is a natural athlete and first excelled at track when he was only six years old. He has represented Canada on the national and international stage in track and field.

[The Speaker in the chair]

He began his football career with the Sherwood Park Sabercats at the age of 10 and is an alumni of Bev Facey high school. During his three years of high school football he scored 82 touchdowns and racked up nearly 7,000 rushing yards, bringing the attention of

American college football scouts and earning him multiple offers to play NCAA football.

Along with winning the Jon Cornish trophy, he was also a finalist for the Doak Walker award for the NCAA top running back, a finalist for the Walter Camp player of the year award, and was named an all-American and Big 12 offensive player of the year. Hubbard is quoted as saying: a lot of people want to say Canadians can't do this; it is only Americans. He wants to show Canadian kids that, whether it's football, track, or really whatever in life, you can achieve it through hard work.

Hubbard lives out his values of helping others both on and off the field. He has already created a nonprofit organization. I am so proud to salute Sherwood Park's own Chuba Hubbard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Fair Deal Panel Report

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 9, 2019, our Premier issued a mandate letter to the members of the Fair Deal Panel. The letter acknowledged that Albertans have an unprecedented level of frustration with their place in the federation. Five years of economic stagnation were deepened and prolonged by policies of the federal government and other provincial governments which sought to land-lock Alberta's vast resources. Those policies plus others that interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction are viewed by many Albertans as suffocating, especially given our province's oversized contribution to Canada's economy and fiscal success.

Albertans have contributed \$611 billion more in federal taxes than we have received back in transfers and services since 1961. This fiscal inequity is a major factor in why public opinion polls have shown that as many as a third of Albertans support the concept of separating from Canada, not to mention that three-quarters of Albertans understand or sympathize with this sentiment. Many Albertans who indicate support for federalism are demanding substantive reforms that will allow the province to develop its own resources and control its own destiny.

The panel's mandate was to listen to Albertans' opinions and concerns, and they did just that. They heard from tens of thousands of engaged, passionate Albertans. The panel explored many measures and initiatives that would strengthen our province's economic position, give us a bigger voice in Confederation, and increase provincial authority over institutions and funding in areas of provincial jurisdiction. Albertans discussed with the panel regarding creating an Alberta pension plan by withdrawing from CPP, establishing a provincial police force, and appointing our own chief firearms officer. These and many other directions were discussed and reviewed.

The panel's report was submitted in May, but its release has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the attention that is required. The Premier has been clear that the report will be released when the public health emergency expires on June 15. It's time. Albertans want to get on with it.

2:50

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and the Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It is a mouthful.

I do rise on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-West. I have two reports to provide today. First, in accordance with

Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has reviewed the petition for Bill Pr.1, the Sisters of the Precious Blood of Edmonton Repeal Act, which was presented on Monday, March 16, 2020. As deputy chair of the committee I can advise the Assembly that the petition complies with Standing Orders 90 to 94.

For my second report I am very pleased to table the requisite number of copies of the committee's final report on Bill 202, Conflicts of Interest (Protecting the Rule of Law) Amendment Act, 2020, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. This bill was referred to the committee on March 5, 2020. Mr. Speaker, the committee's final report recommends that the Bill 202 not – I repeat, not – proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 202.

The Speaker: Hon. members, for clarity's sake, concurrence is not required for the report given with respect to Bill Pr.1.

However, hon. members, a motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 202, Conflicts of Interest (Protecting the Rule of Law) Amendment Act, 2020, is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members who wish to speak to the motion for concurrence? If so, please rise. Seeing a member. Given that members wish to speak to the motion for concurrence in the report, that debate will take place on the next available Monday under the item of business Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Bill 19

Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to introduce Bill 19, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020.

The act would make changes to the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act to further reduce the health harms associated with smoking and second-hand smoke, and in particular address the alarming rise in youth vaping. For too long Alberta has been the only province in Canada without legislation to address the purchase, possession, sale, and consumption of vaping products. The rise in vaping among young Albertans is concerning. The act proposes amendments that strengthen our existing tobacco control measures and introduces aligned vaping provisions. By preventing and reducing the use of tobacco and vaping products, Albertans can lead healthier, longer lives, and ultimately we can reduce associated costs to the health care system, estimated to be up to \$6 billion over the next four years.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there any tablings?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of a report on feedback gathered by the Infrastructure ministry on what Albertans wanted to see done with the former Glenora site of the Royal Alberta Museum. We collected a lot of

input, but I have more to say when the Member for Edmonton-South asks me questions about it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll just remind. I know it's a new process. Upon the completion of tablings you can table your documents in the tabling tables.

With respect to the collection of bills the LAS team as soon as available will come and collect the bill to bring that to the table, but tablings will go into the tabling tables going forward.

Are there other tablings today? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a tabling.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table correspondence with respect to support for my private member's bill, Bill 201, the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act. The first one is from the Alberta Aviation Council, Mr. Bram Tilroe, acting chair; the second is from the city of Lethbridge, Mayor Chris Spearman on behalf of city council of Lethbridge; the third one is from Elizabeth Evans, dean of the Bissett School of Business, on behalf of their aviation program; and last but not least is from Sturgeon county, Mayor Alanna Hnatiw, representing Sturgeon county, which is the proud home of Villeneuve Airport.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, was that a – okay. Sorry. It's like we're at an auction mart. Anything above the shoulder is a bid.

Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 18

Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has the call.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to move second reading of Bill 18, the Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020.

When this government was elected, we committed to listening to Albertans to ensure we had a justice system that reflected our province's unique character and our unique challenges and concerns. Albertans themselves understand the realities that face their communities better than everyone.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

During my time as Minister of Justice I've had the opportunity to travel across Alberta. I spent that time meeting with thousands of Albertans about rural crime, about crime and challenges in their community. No matter which community I visited, one thing I heard loud and clear is that Albertans are frustrated, even angry, with a justice system that does not make them feel safe, secure and protected. They're frustrated with the havoc that crime has caused in their communities and the mental health impacts it's had on so many of them as they live in fear every single night wondering if they are going to be next.

Maclean's magazine in its 2019 compilation of Canada's most dangerous places named seven Alberta cities among the top 10 in the country with the highest increases in crime over the previous

five years. I've also heard time and time again from people in these communities across Alberta how much they appreciate a government that is listening to them, Mr. Speaker, a government that is taking action in making sure we put their priorities first.

In last year's election our party promised a crackdown on crime through numerous actions, including hiring more prosecutors, providing more tools and resources to strengthen policing, and several measures aimed at tackling the primary perpetrators of crime in Alberta, repeat offenders.

A provincial parole board would do better to protect Albertans, their loved ones, and their property from repeat offenders. Our government's platform committed that we would ensure repeat offenders are not able to revictimize them. This is an important part of getting a fair deal for Alberta and getting more Alberta and less Ottawa.

By creating an Alberta parole board, Alberta is taking control of a key component of the administration of justice in this province. It will even help end the revolving-door justice system that has caused so much frustration here in Alberta.

The actions we're taking will make Alberta's parole system more responsive to and safer for Albertans. It'll make sure the province's parole board is fair, fast, and responsive to the needs of communities. An Alberta parole board will enhance our autonomy and control over a very important part of our justice system.

I request that we move second reading of Bill 18, the Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill, Mr. Speaker. It should be a nonpartisan issue, but you never know in this House.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View is rising to debate this bill, Bill 18, Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020, on second reading.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, this bill has been introduced quite recently, and we, therefore, have a significant number of questions, so I will begin there.

I think it's important for us to set the stage. I think Albertans deserve to know that this will affect those who are sentenced to two years less a day or less, so this impacts only those that are in provincial correctional institutions, not those in federal correctional institutions, so any sentence that is two years or longer will not be impacted by this. In fact, the government's own numbers in response to questions from reporters yesterday indicate that this will impact roughly 50 individuals a year. The number of applications likely to come before this board in each given year is 50. The cost is estimated to be about \$600,000 a year. I think that's a pretty significant investment to deal with only 50 applications a year, particularly when the federal government is presently doing this work.

3:00

I think another thing to note and another question I would have for the minister is that the portion of the Corrections Act that was repealed in order to be replaced with this actually gave cabinet the power to establish an Alberta parole board by way of regulation. In fact, this legislation is entirely unnecessary. Cabinet could have done this by way of regulation. Mr. Speaker, I think the minister ought to speak to us in terms of why it is that the choice was taken to do this by way of legislation. I suspect that the answer is that this is less about policy, less about improving the justice system, and it's more about appearing to do things. I think that this is a common theme that we have seen from this government on this file.

They promised during the election campaign that they would increase funding to ALERT by millions of dollars. They have not yet increased that funding, and we found out recently in estimates that they intend to fund that increase in ALERT, which they promised in their campaign, by taking money from the victims of crime fund.

We have also heard this government promise, again in an election year, that they would increase the number of Crown prosecutors by 50. By way of comparison, Mr. Speaker, we increased the number of prosecutors over the course of our four-year term by 70, so 50 is about the increase you would expect. So far that increase hasn't occurred at all. No movement has been made in that direction, and we found out, again in estimates, that this government intends to take money from victims of crime in order to pay for these prosecutors.

Then we have a minister announcing that he is going to put 500 new officers into rural Alberta. As it turns out, by that he meant that municipalities would put 500 new officers into rural Alberta, because, in fact, people are being asked to pay for these officers on their property taxes. The interesting thing about this is that the mechanism has always been available to municipalities to add additional enforcement, so if those municipalities, if the residents of those municipalities wanted to pay for these additional officers, they always had the ability to do that. They chose not to, but now the minister will force them to pay. So they'll force some rural residents to pay up to an additional \$400, and we still do not know what those rural residents will get in return. I think that this is just another piece in this government's attempts to look like they are doing something when, in fact, they aren't doing anything.

I think that's a pretty big concern. I think it's a big concern because we actually do have a problem. I have not only acknowledged that we had a problem, but we had commenced work during our term in government on a solution to that problem, a solution which we know resulted in hundreds of fewer break-ins, hundreds of fewer vehicle thefts, by adding money to support the people of rural Alberta. I think that that is my biggest concern, that this is much more about show than it is about substance.

Another huge area of concern to me is that the minister took the time to explicitly state that one of the people appointed to this would be a rural Albertan. Now, I think that that is legitimate. I think that that's a legitimate thing to say. I think what concerns me is his silence on other matters. There was no commitment to ensure that there is indigenous representation. There was no commitment to ensure that there is representation from the black community. There was no commitment on anything else, and I think that that is a huge concern, particularly with respect to indigenous individuals.

We know that they are overrepresented in the justice system. This is an issue that the legal system and the law have been struggling with for decades now. So I think that when we see an announcement like this, we need to know that there will be representation from those communities because I think we are seeing right now the results of what happens when a system tries to govern people without the voices of those people being involved in the system. Ultimately, the system becomes illegitimate to those it attempts to govern. I think that if we say that some people get to be the people who are part of the justice system, that some people get to make the decisions about everyone else, but the people who are governed by that system are not represented in terms of those doing the work, that's a huge concern, a huge concern.

In fact, it was one of my biggest concerns in the time I sat as minister. We did a lot to ensure that we were increasing representation from underrepresented communities in all aspects of the justice system. I think that's critical. I think it's absolutely critical because people do not feel, when they are being governed

by a system that doesn't reflect them, that that system is legitimate. If the justice system loses its legitimacy, it loses its ability to operate.

I think that the minister's silence on this issue is deafening, and I hope that we will hear over the course of this debate some comment on this because I think it's important. If we are now in charge of this system and the reason given is that it gives us here in Alberta more say on the system, if we're really saying that what needs to happen is a more representative system, then we need to see that there is representation from indigenous communities, from the black community. We need to see that that's something that's happening because otherwise the system loses its legitimacy.

The minister spoke I think at length about people who are frustrated with the justice system, and I think he's right. Certainly, in four years I heard a lot of frustrations from a lot of people, but those frustrations come from multiple different directions. There are very complicated solutions to those problems. Many of those solutions lie outside of the justice system.

What I can tell you is that in the time I spent listening to rural Albertans on this issue – and I did spend a significant amount of time – I went to a number of different places, and I did hear that frustration. I absolutely concur that people were frustrated, but the nice thing is that at those meetings we had representation from the RCMP at almost every one of them. I think that's really important because when you're talking about a problem, the people who are on the ground, who are tasked with dealing with that problem, are incredibly important. What I heard over and over and over again from those RCMP officers and, in fact, from chiefs of police throughout the province is that probably the single most effective investment in crime prevention that the province can make is an investment in affordable housing. We know that affordable housing gives people a place to go. It gives them a home, and that enables them to deal with the other issues that drive their criminality. So those supports are absolutely critical.

Sure. That won't work for everyone. Of course it won't. There are some people that find themselves in conflict with the law because they are addicted, because they are suffering from mental health challenges, because they just were not given the tools and skills to interact in a modern environment. They can't find a job, so they can't get money to pay for their food or their rent, and they're desperate. Sure, there are those people, but there are, I absolutely admit, a lot of people who are just out there to prey on other Albertans. Those people absolutely exist, and those people should absolutely be in jail. I think that the concern is that we don't want to conflate those people who would prey on their fellow Albertans with the fellow Albertans who simply find themselves in a desperate situation.

3:10

I certainly know that one of the first asks I received as Solicitor General was from the then chief of the Edmonton police, and that was for a facility to take individuals who are potentially high, who are potentially suffering from mental health challenges to link them up with supports. If they aren't linked up with supports in that moment, they tend to wind up back on the street, and the police just have to pick them up over and over. You know what? People are frustrated with that system. The police are frustrated with that system, too. I think that ultimately there are a lot of things that can be done. Certainly, investments in policing is a big one. We increased investments in policing because we thought that that was a necessary part of it. We also increased investments in affordable housing because we also thought that that was a necessary part of it. We also ensured that benefits going to individuals were indexed

because that, too, is a necessary part of it, ensuring that the supports are available for people.

So I think, you know, it is fair to say that many people are frustrated with the justice system, but I don't think it's fair to suggest that a bill that will impact roughly 50 people a year is the panacea to that particular problem.

Again, I think that it's worth noting that this bill wasn't really necessary, that cabinet could have done it. It affects very few people. It costs \$600,000 a year, and I'm not convinced that it's going to solve the problem that we're aiming to solve. I think that in the absence of minority groups on the panel, potentially, it's not going to solve any problems at all. So I would like to see that commitment.

Obviously, this is very new. The minister has spoken to this in a press conference and just now at second reading, but we haven't had time for extensive debate on this matter, so it's entirely possible that it is the minister's intent to ensure that those minority groups are represented on the panel. If that's the case, I would ask him to simply say so because I think that that is something that Albertans, particularly in this time, need to see. They need to see a minister stand up and say: "All voices are important. We want to bring this into Alberta to represent all Albertans. We want everyone to have a say. We truly intend to make this more representative of Albertans." I think that if he was willing to say those things, that would be a significant improvement on this particular bill.

You know, this bill is being sold as somehow contributing to Alberta's independence; I mean, maybe in some small way. But, again, the idea that the few weeks in either direction in terms of the sentence of 50 individuals a year: I'm not sure that that rises to the level that people are expecting. I think that perhaps expectations for the impact of this bill that the minister has created in the general public maybe overstate the impact that this is likely to have.

I think, again, Mr. Speaker, that the minister is right when he says that there are challenges with the justice system. There is an enormous number of challenges with the justice system, challenges that we need to face. I think that that being the case, I wonder what the fate of the Justice Summit was. This was brought forward under us. It was brought forward in response to the Jordan decision, and it was participants in all areas of the system coming together to have a conversation about how to improve that system because we all know that there are little pieces here and there that are not working. In fact, those little pieces not working add up to creating a system that doesn't work for everyone, that is creating a lot of challenges. I think I would wonder about the fate of that particular initiative.

I think another thing is that when we talk about Albertans frustrated by the justice system, there are very few people who are more frustrated by the justice system, in my experience, than victims of crime or the relatives of those victims. The system is designed in such a way that the participants in the courtroom are the Crown on behalf of we the people, if you will, and the defendant and the judge, obviously. I think the challenge is that in reality one of the most deeply impacted individuals is the victim, but they're not technically legally present in the courtroom in the same way, and I think that that is a problem. I think it's a problem that we are wrestling with collectively throughout the entire justice system, but if there is one solution to that problem, it is certainly not to take supports away from victims of crime.

Now, admittedly, I have strayed into debating another bill which is currently before the House, but I think the things are related. They're related in the sense that this provides, basically, that for 50 people a year their parole applications will go to a slightly different group of people than they otherwise would have gone to. Meanwhile we see supports being cut directly for victims of crime.

The changes in that bill exclude the vast majority of victims. That's a pretty big concern.

We're also seeing a decrease in support for a number of victim-serving agencies, and I think one of the biggest things that we're seeing is that they've pulled support – one of the things with the victims of crime fund was that it was accumulating a surplus. The Auditor General asked about that surplus. He asked the ministry to go away and do a bunch of work on what the needs of victims were and how best to meet them. We did that work, and we came up with a plan that rolled out.

Now, some of the money was easy because we could get it to victim-serving agencies like policing, community-based agencies immediately. Some of it was more challenging because we were setting up new units. One of those units was modelled on the highly successful HomeFront project in Calgary and would have served the rest of the province that doesn't have access to that program. That domestic violence model is, I think, second to none in the country, and it would have been great to extend that to all victims of domestic violence, but instead that has been taken away. That has been shelved so that the government can use that same money to pay for election promises that it made, and I think that's a huge issue.

Sure. Those things are important. They're absolutely important. We should find a way to fund them. I don't deny that for a second. I think that the problem is that we shouldn't do it at the expense of victims because they are often the forgotten element of the system and they ought not be. I think that that is one of the fundamental challenges that our criminal justice system will wrestle with, and I think that supporting victims is a much better solution to that problem than what is being proposed in this bill, which, as I've said, is going to impact a very small number of people. We don't even know exactly how it's going to impact them. Certainly, the minister has implied that we're going to lock up everyone who steals a nail polish and throw away the key, but it's not totally clear to me that that's what's going to happen here.

Because my time is approaching an end, again, I think the most important commitment we need from the minister is indigenous representation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 18, the Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020. I'm particularly pleased to speak to it so shortly after my esteemed colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. With her extensive experience and knowledge not just as a lawyer but of course because she was the Minister of Justice for four years, her insight is particularly useful on this bill and how it fits in with, essentially, what is a package of legislation that is coming forward from the government.

3:20

I do believe it's important to see how these pieces connect because I do think there are significant overlaps as they were actually part of the government's overall crime reduction strategy as set out in their campaign. So it is part of an overall strategy, and I can see how that all goes together. I think it is important to see this legislation in the context of the commitments that have been made and the commitments that have not been followed through on to some extent as well with respect to this government and to see how it fits within that.

One of the things that my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View mentioned in her comments, I have to admit, stands out to me

a little bit because I do care a little bit about legislative drafting and the decision to move certain things from regulation into legislation. Of course, we know, and I know, Mr. Speaker, that you're aware as well, given your background, that the purpose of moving things or putting things into legislation versus regulation is really about process, democratic oversight, as well as whether or not there are certain provisions that we think may require amendment.

Of course, as we know, it's not easy to bring legislation forward in this Assembly. It takes quite some time, and you of course have to be government in order to do that, and you might be fitting it within a larger legislative agenda. It's hard – and it should be hard – to change legislation because it's meant to be predictable and to provide citizens a certainty about what their expectations are with respect to their conduct, their business, and all that.

What's remarkable, though, here is that we also have a government who has very much campaigned on – in addition to reducing crime, they have campaigned significantly on the reduction of red tape. So it's interesting to me that the decision would be made to move a number of authorities from regulation, which, quite frankly, is easier and quicker to amend. It is usually more detail oriented. We see with a number of boards and agencies that are established, the details of how that agency or board is comprised, the membership, quorum: all of those details usually fit quite well within regulation because they are details. They're not the policy direction. They're not a greater scheme. They're really about the nitty-gritty mechanics of how the policy direction set out in legislation is actually put into effect.

I note that, as my colleague mentioned, it's interesting, because the concept of introducing an Alberta parole board is actually not new. In fact, that authority already very much existed and currently exists – because this bill, of course, has not passed yet – within the Corrections Act. I note in particular, for example, that section 24 of the existing Corrections Act sets out that “the National Parole Board is hereby authorized to exercise in Alberta the jurisdiction described in section 108 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (Canada).” And then section 25 of the existing Corrections Act sets out that “the Lieutenant Governor in Council may appoint a Provincial Parole Board of not fewer than 3 nor more than 9 members.” It proceeds to set out in some detail some of the regulation-making authorities that would establish, essentially, an Alberta parole board but through regulation.

As my colleague noted, this Bill 18 that we're considering today actually goes through and basically repeals those provisions of the Corrections Act and moves what was already authority that was established to be fleshed out in regulation and moves it into the legislation. Really, what we're seeing: the bulk of this Bill 18 is actually setting out the details of establishing that Alberta parole board, which could have been done much more simply by regulation and could have been done and easily changed and amended as needed because regulations can be more responsive. They are scheduled for regular review, unlike legislation, which continues on unless there is a defined period in the act. Legislation continues on and remains in force until it is repealed. Regulations are actually subject to very regular review, which provides the opportunity for regular updates, consultation with stakeholders to see whether or not some of the mechanics are actually working to achieve the policy objectives set out in the legislation.

So the decision to move it into legislation actually makes it much more cumbersome, and it's usually why governments, particularly those who are focused on red tape reduction, try to streamline legislation. They try to make it actually set up as a communication to stakeholders, to Albertans about: what are the policy objectives of this piece of legislation?

I actually worked for a number of Progressive Conservative governments when I was a public servant within Alberta Education. I worked within legislative drafting at times, and that was always the direction. The governments at the time, the Conservative governments at the time, wanted less in legislation because it was bulky, it was cumbersome, it was hard to change, it was not easily understood. The context in which I did that – it was actually the School Act – I remember a number of ministers at the time setting out: “You know, this legislation is simply too big and bulky. Albertans don’t understand it. They don’t understand what we’re trying to achieve because it’s got too much detail in it.” So I’m surprised to see this Conservative government, United Conservative government, choose to put more into legislation.

It actually leads me to the similar conclusion that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View set out, which is that this is really about show, because you don’t get a lot of gold stars from your members and your donors for setting out regulations, for, I guess, passing policy documents. You know, you set something out in your campaign platform, and you want the shiny gold star for doing it, so you have to put it into legislation. My concern about that – and actually it really should be the government’s concern; it’s not really my concern so much – is that that contradicts their own other campaign platforms about reducing red tape.

It’s an interesting decision, I think, by this government to move that, but of course they’re trying to get the accolades and be able to do their check mark thing of promise made, promise kept. Maybe there’ll be a nice big cardboard sign that the Premier and the Minister of Justice can stand in front of. We also know as Albertans by now – we’ve been subject to this government for some time – the value of those big cardboard commitments that they make and those promises they make. They’re really the value of cardboard, because this government has pretty much set on fire most of those cardboard commitments so far. But if there’s a photo op here for the minister, I suppose that that’s the bigger objective rather than looking at whether or not this actually makes a difference with respect to reducing crime.

Now, I appreciate the comments, again, from my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, who talked about how it’s not enough to simply, I guess, establish a parole board for what has been identified and the minister has acknowledged, as really about 50 individuals who would be subject to the Alberta parole board. Of course, the number of convictions for sentences that are less than two years is smaller, that would be subject to parole, so really this is not going to impact that many people: 50 people. But it is going to cost Alberta taxpayers \$600,000. Now, I know. I believe that this government has a very loose interpretation of how taxpayer dollars should be spent. They probably believe that that’s an appropriate amount of money to spend, for example, for their party fundraisers and their social media trolls. That seems to be a good use of money, so I’m not sure that I trust that they have a good sense of what taxpayers are looking for. But \$600,000 for 50 individuals who would be subject to it doesn’t seem like a great investment of money.

What is a good investment of money, and which we know research and evidence is very clear about, that actually reduces crime, is an overall strategy that looks not just at the front end of the criminal justice system; it doesn’t look just at policing, it doesn’t look just at prosecutors. Those are all important parts of the system. Absolutely. It doesn’t look just at prisons. It also looks at the investments we make in people, people who are likely to be more subject to the criminal justice system. It’s about investments in things such as early childhood education. It’s about investment in communities of colour to make sure that there are full opportunities. It’s investments in health, mental health, addictions; all of those pieces come together.

But when we see this reduction of crime strategy, it’s focused only – typically, I have to say from a Conservative government – on that front-end piece of crime and justice and not looking at the underlying supports that are necessary to actually reduce the number of people who are both perpetrators and victims of crime.

I note, by the way, that my colleague also mentioned affordable housing, which is not only a key part of making sure that people – especially if we’re talking about property crime and that sort of thing. Investments in affordable housing are an incredible way to actually reduce crime. It also would be tied very closely to other commitments that this government has set out in their platform, particularly with respect to things such as domestic violence and human trafficking.

3:30

We repeatedly see that the government’s response to these issues are on the crime and justice sort of spectrum of things and not looking at the actual investments that make differences in people’s lives. When we talked about some of the good bills that we’ve supported coming forward from the government – for example, Clare’s law. That’s a great measure to take. We supported it. Similarly to the human trafficking act, certainly, we need to address those issues, but they focus only on the criminal justice or the civil court side of things. They didn’t really focus on what other supports we can provide to individuals to keep them out of the criminal justice system and to actually ensure that everybody has the opportunity for full health, for housing, for education, and the things that actually, we know by research, make a difference in reducing criminality. That’s what I feel is lacking significantly from this crime reduction strategy.

I also want to go back to one of my colleagues’ comments with respect to membership on this board because we are at a very pivotal crossroads time right now. Well, for many reasons right now it’s been quite a challenging and remarkable year, in perhaps a negative way, for not just Albertans and Canadians but across the globe with the pandemic. But also right now we would be remiss to stand here in this House and talk about changes to the criminal justice system without acknowledging the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system both in terms of victims and perpetrators of persons of colour, particularly in Alberta the highly disproportionate representation of indigenous persons in jails and prisons and in the criminal justice system.

We are having that conversation. We should be having that conversation all the time. I think that’s something we’ve talked about regularly already in this House. This is something we should be addressing and should be part of and infused in all of our decision-making, but we have this opportunity right now – and I look forward to further debate at further stages of this bill – where we’re actually speaking about bills that directly affect our criminal justice system. We have an opportunity here – and I hope it will be carried forward in some of the other legislation that’s been brought forward, for example, the changes to the victims of crime fund which were set out in Bill 16 – to talk about, really talk about race and the impact of the criminal justice system on persons of colour.

I think and I’m hoping that when we get to the Committee of the Whole stage of this bill, we can have a really fulsome, honest conversation about small changes that can be very meaningful. I see, for example, that section 27(2) – and this is part of section 4 of Bill 18, but it talks about section 27(2) of the Corrections Act. It talks about the membership of this Alberta parole board. It says – this is all it is. I mean, it says a lot of other things about membership in terms of the term of office of a member, but the only thing it says about who can be a member of the Alberta parole board is, “The Parole Board comprises such members appointed by the Lieutenant

Governor in Council as the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers necessary.” So, of course, that’s essentially a cabinet order that would decide who is a member of the Alberta parole board.

But this is where we have an opportunity to really signal the importance of representation of marginalized, isolated, victimized, overly representative populations in a concrete way. It’s the kind of conversation that I hope we’re going to have regularly when we’re talking about criminal justice matters but particularly because of what’s happening right now in the world. None of us are immune to those conversations. We know very much that there are issues associated with race with respect to our criminal justice system. I invite the members of both sides of this House to have a very honest, fulsome conversation about how we can make changes right now that signal that we recognize that and that is a matter that needs to be addressed. Part of that is going to be about membership of that parole board.

My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View talked about indigenous representation and Métis peoples. I think that’s a very important conversation that we should all partake in, and I look forward to it, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I would just remind all members of this House that to presume a decision of this House prior to that decision being made would be improper, so to say, “When we are going to be in Committee of the Whole,” I think it would probably be more proper to say, “if and when” or something to that effect.

With that aside now, 29(2)(a) is available to anyone who wishes to take the opportunity for questions and comments.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 18, Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020. I think we can all agree here that one of the fundamental responsibilities of a government is to ensure the safety and security of its citizens, enforce laws, and when people don’t abide by those laws, they’re guilty of breaching those laws, have a justice system in place which is fair, which is efficient, which is accountable, and is providing justice to Albertans in a timely manner.

Setting up that system or that system in general has many different parts, and parole, which permits those who are incarcerated to be released earlier than their full term of incarceration on certain conditions, is also an important part of that. However, the way our justice system is set up, the criminal justice system, for the most part, is federal jurisdiction, and anyone who is convicted and incarcerated for over two years will be in the federal system, federal penitentiaries. To be clear, this bill will only apply to those who are serving a term of less than two years. That’s what it relates to.

I think it’s concerning that we are making a change to our justice system, and our Justice minister gets up and the best he can say about the bill is that we want less Ottawa and more Alberta. They, I guess, just a few days ago applied for a wage subsidy from Ottawa. There they didn’t think that they want more Alberta. Here we are dealing with the criminal justice system, dealing with an issue that will have an impact for the life, liberty, security of Albertans. I think we deserve a better explanation. Albertans deserve a better explanation than that, a better policy rationale than that. Why are we making this change? What are some of the issues that we are facing in the existing system that this bill will fix?

We are still part of Canada. Many things we share as Canadians. I think Albertans deserve to know what those overriding concerns are that were raised by Albertans, that were raised by those who are

dealing with these systems, raised by those who are in the criminal justice system so that we can understand the background to these changes. As we heard from my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, that impacts 50 applications a year and costs government \$600,000.

3:40

But again, more important than this, the parole board makes the decisions that have bearing on the liberty and security of individuals, their Charter rights, those things. Why was it necessary for the government to create this separate parole board? Absent that explanation, absent that rationale I think we are left to speculate that government just wants to be seen as doing something about the justice system, about rural crimes, and about issues facing our municipalities.

When we know that one of the things . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you.

I just want to remind all members of the House that should they wish to carry out conversations amongst themselves, there is the opportunity to do so in the lounges on both sides of the House.

If the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall could please continue as you have the call in the House at this moment.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping that you would interject because the member from St. Albert and the member from Fort McMurray were continuously talking while I was trying to make some comment on this bill.

I was talking about the impression that government is trying to give through this piece of legislation. If I talk about my own riding, if I talk about my own city, like, in northeast Calgary we have seen crime-related issues, and we brought those to the attention of the Minister of Justice as well. And at a time when we were looking for more supports, at a time when Albertans were looking up to their government to put resources that are needed and necessary and provide for the safety and security of those Albertans, they made deep cuts to the police budget in Calgary, almost \$13 million. City of Calgary municipal leadership is on record, the city of Calgary police chief is on record saying that they made cuts which will make these things even worse.

So if they want to do something that will strengthen our criminal justice system, I think it has many different parts that government needs to focus on. First and foremost, it’s important that the law enforcement agencies across this province have the resources they need to do their job efficiently. And what we have seen from this government is that they have made deep cuts, they have made reckless cuts to the budgets of law enforcement across this province. Just in Calgary alone they made \$13 million cuts to policing, to police budgets. Similarly, they are making smaller municipalities pay for their policing costs.

Just yesterday we were talking about victims of crime fund legislation, where they’re taking from those victims as well and trying to pay for the cuts they made to policing budgets and saying that this piece of legislation somehow will fix issues that Albertans are facing across this province, cities, in northeast Calgary, in rural Alberta. I don’t think that this bill will have any impact on those issues. When we talk to our constituents about issues relating to their safety and security – like, in February, I believe, I had an open house, town hall in northeast Calgary. There were many issues raised with respect to safety concerns, with respect to justice system concerns, but, Mr. Speaker, this was not one of them. That’s not the kind of action which will address any of those issues that were raised by my constituents, that are raised by Albertans, rural and urban.

We certainly can talk about it, but I think that even if we look at this piece of legislation – my colleague also talked about it – if we just look at the issues in our parole system, in our criminal justice system, like, there is enough evidence that Alberta has a disproportionately high incarceration level of any jurisdiction in Canada of indigenous communities. If we want to separate from Canada and have our own parole board, if we are doing that, we should do it right. We should talk to law enforcement agencies, we should talk to Albertans, we should talk to indigenous communities and see what issues are there that we can address and make this better legislation, make this work better for Albertans.

The way this board is set up, all it says is that the Governor in Council may appoint board members. It doesn't say anything about representation. If the government really wants to improve the justice system, which I believe they do, they should consider writing it in the legislation that there will be representation from indigenous communities, from racialized communities. That will send a clear message that this government is considering to address the issue of overrepresentation of indigenous communities in our justice system. But that's not what we heard, and that's not what's included in this piece of legislation.

3:50

If we want to have an effective parole system, there are other issues that must be addressed as well. Alberta also has one of the lowest rates of legal aid in the country. I'm proud to say that when we were in government, we made changes to legal aid, and we added money to legal aid to ensure that people can access justice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to make comments or questions. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was enthralled by the comments shared by the Member for Calgary-McCall, he himself being from a cultural community. I was hoping that he could expand a little bit more based on his insights but specifically from being a lawyer himself, having a past in understanding the criminal justice system, but also from that perspective, if he could continue, I'd really enjoy that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to respond.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member, for the question. That member is quite right. I do come from a . . .

Member Loyola: Cultural community.

Mr. Sabir: . . . cultural community, the words my colleague used. I also represent a constituency that is predominantly comprised of cultural communities, people of many different cultural, faith backgrounds, people of many different talents, people coming from many different parts of the world. They may have different perceptions of the justice system, and they may come from different kinds of justice systems.

Also, when I was practising law, I practised indigenous law, so I have had the opportunity to work closely with indigenous communities, indigenous bands. Even though we were practising land title claims, indigenous rights claims, there would often be opportunities to learn about their experience with the justice system and their desire to work with the justice system, work with government to make things better for their communities.

When we talk about the parole board and if it's the intention of the government to have an Alberta parole board in place which can take into account factors, which can take into account the context that is unique and specific to Alberta, I think that it's important that government should state that in this legislation, that in changing parole boards, in changing it to make Alberta's own parole board, they will take into account issues facing cultural communities, issues facing indigenous communities. Alberta has 20-plus per cent of those cultural communities, first-generation immigrant communities, and around 10 per cent or so of indigenous communities, but indigenous communities are way overrepresented in the justice system, so I think that it will be helpful. It will send a clear message that the government wants to address issues facing our justice system, that the government wants to work with all communities, and the government wants to give representation at the decision-making table to those who have been disadvantaged, who have been sidelined, who have not been part of these decision-making tables. Again, these are important decisions. These are decisions that relate to their safety, security, liberty, important decisions, so it's critical that those who are impacted by this system the most have representation and the ability to be part of those decisions.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 18, Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020. Certainly I appreciate hearing from my colleagues here on this side of the aisle talk at length about this bill and some of the concerns that it presents. This bill was just tabled yesterday. We understand from what has been shared already and the bill itself that this gives authority for the provincial government to create its own parole board, a board independent from the federal board, which is what we have currently in place. I understand that the timeline for the creation of this Alberta parole board is January 2021.

Of course, it is just the jurisdiction of people who are charged under provincial law, so these are all sentences of less than two years, and it hears applications for provincial inmates regarding their release. We also know that the creation of this board that this bill identifies will be with an annual budget of about \$600,000, and approximately 50 applications have been approved, I guess, the last time they measured that. It's not for a huge number of inmates requesting a release, but 50 had been successful in that approval rate previously. Certainly, what we're hearing, the Premier himself said that this parallel provincial system will be fairer, faster, and more efficient. No one would argue with any of those things if indeed that comes to fruition.

I think the key purpose of this bill, according to the government, is really to reduce rural crime, and that is why they have brought it forward. Certainly, it's not a surprise. It is something that they had in their platform, so we did know about this. However, it is, you know, questionable about whether it actually will fulfill the goal of the legislation, which is reducing rural crime.

This isn't an extraordinary activity in Canada, to have a parallel board with the federal board. We know that Ontario and Quebec also have provincial parole boards, so it's not something that is, you know, unique to Alberta. These other, larger provinces have also created these parallel boards.

I guess my question – and I'm going to keep coming back to it – is just: what would most effectively reduce rural crime? I think that certainly not a member of this Assembly would not want to do that; we want to make sure that crime is reduced in our province. Of

course, one of the provisions that will be possible for this government is that they can actually choose the members of the parole board, and this is cited as a reason that it'll be more effective than the federal board. They're feeling that the representation as chosen by the federal government is not understanding, you know, what happens in Alberta, the lay of the land, people who don't understand people in rural Alberta or don't understand the issues in rural Alberta.

4:00

That's why they want to create this board, so that they can choose the people who will be on it. In the hopes of reducing rural crime, they'll be choosing people who have a concern about that, perhaps come from rural Alberta, understand the issues that are there. We know that in any kind of social policy development or social policy implementation or public policy in general, having people involved who have the lived experience, who live in those rural communities, who understand what's going on is a very good step. I must say that I agree with that.

Certainly, when I was teaching at the university social policy courses, that was sort of a key component. You have people with lived experience. If you're doing – I don't know – a program about income support, then you have people with that lived experience. People who have been on income support should be sitting around the table making those decisions about the policy development and implementation. People who are making policies about intimate partner violence: then you should have survivors of violence at that table. So, certainly, I am completely in support of having people who are directly impacted, live in those communities as part of it.

I guess I just want to make sure that the government is also thinking about a diversity of representation so that we're making sure that various groups are part of that. Certainly, it is very clear to all of us, having, you know, as many of you I'm sure have done also, watched the horrific situation in the U.S. with the tragic death of an African-American citizen at the hands of a police officer. It's so important that people with diverse representation are part of that, so people from the indigenous community need to be part of that committee, whether they be First Nation or Métis, Albertans of colour. We need to look at gender, so people from the LGBTQ community, women. So not only having people from rural Alberta, but a diversity of people from rural Alberta needs to be considered by this government. I would just present that to the government to think about as they will have the lived experience and the understanding of the challenges, maybe, that are in the way, the concerns. How do we address these issues?

I guess I want to go a little bit beyond just the creation of this parole board as a way to actually address the concerns about rural crime. What causes crime? We know that crime is really – I mean, there are sort of umbrella terms, I guess, to talk about different things. How can I say this? There are certain groupings of ideas about what causes crime. There are three that are identified. One is economic factors, so people who are living in poverty, people who lack educational opportunities, and they lack meaningful work. These are all stressful, difficult situations for citizens, and that can put them at risk of crime. We also know that social environment also impacts increasing levels of crime depending on what kind of social environment you have. Family structures: that's the third sort of concept that also needs to be looked at in terms of looking at the root causes of crime.

Although, you know, this bill believes that it's going to reduce rural crime by having local appointees of this government make decisions about whether someone is granted parole or not, I think that's kind of a grand proclamation. I think it's perhaps going too far. I think there are much more effective ways of reducing crime

in Alberta, and they have a lot to do with those three sort of umbrella concepts that I just mentioned. I feel like the government is kind of – if they really were sincere about wanting to reduce rural crime, they'd be looking at those root causes.

I must say that it seems like one hand is doing one thing and another hand is doing another. If I can just go into a little more detail about sort of the very fundamental things that really create an increase in crime in a society, we'll see that some of the things that this UCP government is doing are actually exacerbating the situation to increase crime. I don't think they want to do that, but I think, you know, they need to look more deeply at what are the root causes of crime.

We know that economic factors are a big part of it. We know that if people lack financial resources, they lack educational opportunities. Sometimes that's very linked, of course, to financial resources. They lack meaningful employment opportunities. Of course, obviously, right now we're in a really difficult time with COVID-19, but even before that our major industry in our province was in a tailspin. It was and is a very difficult time, and certainly many people in rural Alberta worked in the oil and gas industry.

Certainly, having grown up in a small town in the Peace River country, I know that a lot of people in the summer had farms and they plowed the land, and in the winter they worked on the rigs. That's how they made their living, you know, had to sort of work two jobs just to make it. I think most wanted to be on the farm but just couldn't make enough money. I grew up in that environment, where people depended so heavily on that. Certainly, out of high school, even without high school, many people would get really excellent jobs in the oil and gas industry and make significant dollars, but that has gone away now. People aren't having that choice anymore with the plummeting of the world price of oil. That's created such havoc that a lot of people who would get those jobs aren't able to anymore. Of course, that's causing them extreme stress, financial hardship, and all sorts of difficulties.

Economic factors are so key, so that's why it's really important to, you know, certainly during COVID and regular times, have robust public programs, economic support systems, have a government that invests in job creation so that people are supported even when those jobs aren't there in the private industry. Sometimes they're not, and we need to have people have that meaningful work that is paid well enough so that they can care for themselves and their families.

Another key issue that does create sort of higher risk for crime is the social environment. One of the social root causes of crime is inequality. If we have a society that has income and social inequality, that society has higher levels of crime. We know Alberta has the greatest income disparity of any province in Canada. Certainly, there are people who are doing very, very well, but there are others who are doing poorly. That income disparity creates tremendous inequality. There are people who have, you know, great abundance, and there are others who don't, and this inequality also is a significant cause of poverty.

4:10

Also, about the social environment. The lack of support for families and neighbourhoods, inaccessibility to services, sometimes lack of leadership in communities to support that community, and sometimes low value placed on individual well-being: these all sort of create a perfect storm of being at higher risk for crime in the social environment. That's why it's so important to make sure we have an inclusive society, that all people, all our citizens, and all are supported. That's why.

Well, like, for example, this week, it's, you know, Pride Week, Pride Month, so we celebrate people of the LGBTQ community and

support them to be included in our society so that they feel very much part of . . . [Ms Sigurdson's speaking time expired.]

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. An individual who caught my eye was the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's great to be back here again. I think we're one of the first Legislatures, actually, in Canada to be full on and fully functional, and I guess at that point what it means and what we've seen here is: game on. We've seen a lot of partisan politics taking place. I made a speech a while back about keeping our sticks on the ice and our gloves on, but honestly, at this point I'm about to drop the gloves.

I've heard lots and lots of information coming from the other side. The one that was most recent here was the Member for Edmonton-Riverview giving us a lecture on some of the items that are the root cause issues for crime. Now, the interesting part, the number one that she regaled about, was the economy.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I'll just take this opportunity to remind all members of this House to ensure that the comments that they make throughout the cut and thrust of debate go through the Speaker in order to depersonalize certain aspects of that.

If the hon. member could please continue.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'm a little bit rusty here, so thanks for letting me get back to that.

The economy was the biggest thing. We were talking about the disparaging economy. Holy crow. All of a sudden they're proponents of the pipeline industry; they're proponents of the energy sector. It wasn't too long ago that they were the ones standing out front holding up protest signs. The former Premier of this province actually told: pencils down, quote, unquote, on the Keystone XL project. Oh, in my area, well, the gas, the coal miners: literally at this point they shut down the coal mines, a rapid acceleration of that. Yeah. You want to see economic impacts? That's what's causing a lot of this rural crime.

Now, you know, I get out a little bit. I get a call from the Chinatown community to come down and talk to them because they find that a UCP MLA who is rural actually will listen more than their own MLAs that represent them in that area. So when I'm going down to that area, they're talking about the economy. There's massive crime taking place.

One of the other underlying root causes that we've seen here is, well, the safe injection sites and the harm-reduction sites. Do you realize that within a stone's throw distance of city centre downtown, all three in a million-person population, all of those facilities were put in that one place? Those folks from the Chinatown community were steamrolled over top of that. They had a 4,000-person petition they put in place. It fell on deaf ears. It's not just rural crime we're talking about. I don't know; let's put one of those facilities out in Strathcona, and then I want to see the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona – maybe she'd like one of those in her backyard, and then her constituents can come talk to her about crime issues, impact statements, and how good that harm reduction works.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview: she seems to be from the social side of things. She was a social worker in her prior life. Fantastic. Let's throw one over in your area, and then you can talk to me about how it's impacting your community. You can tell me about the disparity. When you start putting those things in your own backyard, then you can start dealing with it.

What our minister has been up to is literally trying to clean up the mess. They go and pull levers on the economy, they do all those

things, and they don't realize that it takes a while to turn it around? They caused this problem and sit there from this, I don't know, level of platitude and stand up there and profess to know all this stuff. They take no accountability nor responsibility for their actions. None, Mr. Speaker. So then we're sitting here trying to clean up this blessed mess, dealing with all the COVID items, and the best they have to offer us is a lecture on the economy. This is the same group that was going to dump \$4.5 billion into some little kid's train set that they never should have touched in the first place, and then they're talking about the XL project. That's the one they tried to tank.

Yeah, there are issues here, economy-driven issues from the folks next door that couldn't run a lemonade stand if their life depended on it, and now they're going to tell us how to clean up the crime issues. Well, we are, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very proud of this government for what they're doing. I'm very proud of the minister for putting items in place.

The other one here that just got me: now you're starting to threaten seniors again, twisting words coming out of this pandemic. Unreal. So I guess the gloves are off, Mr. Speaker. I guess that now we're going to get back to the partisan stuff or slanting truths or visiting history in a different light. Why don't we get off the bench, stop that little childish behaviour again, and get back to work? Why don't you support the items that we're trying to do? Everyone can have different perspectives, but we're trying to clean up this mess.

Minister, please keep it up. I'm actually going to cede time back to them because I actually want to hear their response.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen, with about 40 seconds.

Member Loyola: Yes. I want to just say thank you to all the members in the House. I can understand that in debate in this House we can get frustrated, especially when people do not agree with our point of view, but that doesn't mean that we need to go to the extent where we're threatening and saying that the gloves are coming off. I know that the member is not being literal – I understand that – but I don't believe that it contributes to a healthy debate within this House, Mr. Speaker, so I'm going to ask us all to just stay calm. Let's keep debating.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are back to debating second reading of Bill 18, Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in this place and debate this bill today . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. For your information, we will be restarting the clock for you as well. I would just remind all members, if they do want to have conversations when the call is not theirs, especially when they're going to do so from one side of the House to the other, to perhaps take those conversations outside of the House.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-South could please continue, and a reminder that you will have the full 15 minutes plus the 29(2)(a) should that become partially or pretty much all available to you. Thank you.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in this place and debate Bill 18, the Alberta parole board act. I think there have been some very impassioned voices, from both sides of the House, today around this bill because we're talking about issues

that affect many families across this entire province and we're talking about issues that have far-ranging impacts into our communities as well. I think it's important to understand that when we talk about this bill, the opposition here is trying to understand how this bill will operate, how this bill will have positive impacts on the community, and indeed if it may have adverse impacts that were not accounted for. I don't think that we need to stoop to schoolyard bullying, but I think we have some legitimate questions that we'd like to see some answers to.

I think that when we talk about this bill, we are concerned that without actual, proper resourcing to support parolees and having actual investments to prevent things like reoffending and to support community integration, we may actually see adverse effects that will be negative overall for our systems, that will be negative overall for our communities. We can talk about how we intend to address these issues. I hope the minister gets up and has the opportunity to discuss some of the finer points of that as we move forward, or perhaps other members of the government caucus can speak to why they think that this system they're proposing, this system that it appears many of the government caucus members if not all of the government caucus members are supporting – why do they personally believe that this will have positive effects in their communities? I hope that we can hear about that.

I admit that I was a little bit disappointed when I heard from the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. Instead of speaking to the actual issues in the bill and the clauses and the actual policies that were being proposed, he spoke and made attacks on other types of issues that really don't have anything to do with the bill in front of us. I hope that we won't be seeing more of that from members opposite in the government caucus here.

I mean, it's pretty clear that we have very passionate members on both sides of this House around the issues of rural crime and rural policing. It's very clear that these issues will affect many communities if not every community – right? – so it's very clear that when we talk about these issues, we understand that they depend on supports, that they depend on actual investment, that they depend on making sure that we're not just downloading the costs of these programs onto municipalities, that they depend on making sure that we support them and fully fund them in ways that will be able to have positive impacts.

That's why I'm concerned that when we look at bills like this, when we look at the stated goals of the Justice minister, when we look at the stated goals of this bill, it doesn't usually come with any sort of support. It doesn't come with any sort of programming. It doesn't come with anything.

4:20

I mean, when you look at some of these branches that have been rebranded, existing peace officers from fish and wildlife enforcement, from commercial vehicle enforcement, and from the sheriffs branch, we can look at these branches and say that their budgets were actually cut in this most recent budget, right? When we look at the budget cuts to police funding and to the peace officer funding to below 2018 levels at this point, Mr. Speaker, when we look at these significant cuts, it raises the question: are we actually being serious? Is the government actually seriously trying to address this issue? I think that it becomes pretty clear that they are not actually taking this seriously, because they aren't willing to put the work in. They aren't willing to actually go in and say, "These services will require money; actually, if we want to accomplish our goals, things cost money," and the government isn't serious about that. The government looks like they're trying to do platitudes here, and it doesn't look like they've actually looked at the longer term impacts.

I mean, I think that some of my colleagues already mentioned here that we'd be interested in seeing some economic impact studies and what the economic impacts of this may be, who perhaps was consulted with and what was learned in the consultations. I hope the minister would be able to speak to that at some time in the future here.

I think it's really important that when we talk about these programs, we understand that we're creating a duplication of effort, right? This very bill, Bill 18, the Alberta parole board act, will actually create a duplication of effort. Right now, currently, of course, this program is run through the Parole Board of Canada. What is the value for money? I believe the number I saw was that it's going to cost \$600,000 for the creation of this board, right? So \$600,000 to create this board that this bill is going to cost Albertans, \$600,000 that won't be going to front-line services, \$600,000 that won't be going to hiring more peace officers or police officers, \$600,000 that municipalities won't see after the cost of new police officers was downloaded to them, Mr. Speaker.

So we're talking about not insignificant sums of money. We're talking about real money where there hasn't been an assessment done or where we haven't seen an assessment done. This House cannot make an accurate judgment of what will actually be effective in terms of the stated goals. We don't know what remuneration will be paid to board members, what type of benefits board members will receive. We don't know any of these details. What will the board application even look like? Who would be qualified to sit on this board? We don't know any of these details, Mr. Speaker.

When we consider, basically, the lack of details in this bill, the lack of ability for members of this House to make an accurate assessment of whether an Alberta parole board would actually benefit and have positive impacts other than duplication of effort, it becomes really hard to speak conclusively, because this government is not providing that information to this House. This government is not doing the work to try and convince Albertans, to try to convince this Assembly, and to try to convince every single elected member in this place that there is going to be value for money, right? That is going to be the really core question: what additional value does this bill bring to Albertans? What does this bill do that will help decrease rural crime? What does this bill do that will cost the government of Alberta less money? All we know is that it's going to cost approximately \$600,000. We don't know whether that will actually have any real return. We don't even know for this board if they're going to be paying the board members and how much. I mean, I'd like to know why they're also asking for a parole board like this to only have a quorum of two.

I mean, those are some very important questions that Albertans will want answered before we move forward with this bill. I think that they're really important questions that, if we don't get answered and if we do move to committee stage, we'll want to have some more updates on as well. I think that when we look at these types of boards being created, when we look at significant investments of money, significant sums of money being spent on these redundant systems, or ostensibly redundant systems, Mr. Speaker – I don't know; the government hasn't attempted to convince us otherwise yet; I hope they will at some point here – it's going to be important to be able to have all of that information.

I mean, what is the Alberta parole board even going to bring to the table? Are there going to be additional conditions that the Alberta parole board will put in in terms of things like granting parole? I think that's a very important question that every single member of this Assembly should be asking. If, indeed, the government is so convinced that there should be less Ottawa and more Alberta and that an Alberta parole board will bring this great value – Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that they didn't think that

when they took the federal wage subsidy. If the government does think that in this case, perhaps they should actually come out and say why. They should explain why their bill is important and explain why their bill is going to be effective.

When they speak about things like reoffending rates, what stats are available for the reoffending rates of parolees who have been sentenced to less than two years? I think that's going to be very important for us as we move forward. I think it's important when we look at this. A government member, I think the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, got up earlier and was talking about rural crime and intercity crime and all of these things. He didn't actually explain to the House and the government has failed to explain to the House, Mr. Speaker, so far how the Alberta parole board and spending \$600,000 on duplicating a federal program, on creating this redundancy, on spending Alberta taxpayer money on a system that already exists – they're saying: well, we're better, and we're just going to do it because.

Mr. Speaker, the disconnect for me here and, I think, for many of my colleagues in the opposition is going to be: how does this actually effectively reduce those crime rates, right? Whether it's rural crime, intercity crime, or suburban crime, like in my area, what actual effects will this have on that? What outcomes are you expecting? Who has the minister consulted with? What professionals has the minister consulted with that can explain or could the minister explain how this will have positive effects for Albertans, how this will actually make a difference for Albertans? Is this just an exercise where the minister wants to go and spend \$600,000 to create his own little board to have some people to talk to, or is it actually a program that is going to have outcomes that will be positive for people who are victims of crime or people who are perpetrators and are trying to move forward through the justice system?

For all of the people involved in our justice system and for all of the people involved in our judiciary, we need to understand what the actual goals and outcomes are going to be, and I think that the minister needs to stand in this place and explain that, because when we talk about the Alberta parole board – this was in the government platform. I understand that. The government platform included this as part of their rural crime strategy, I believe, and it was one of the initiatives they had to tackle these growing areas of crime, right? And that's great. The government wants to address crime. I think that's a very noble goal, Mr. Speaker.

But if the government can't even explain how or why this helps address crime, I think it speaks to the lack of research this government repeatedly puts into their bills, that this government is not willing to go out and do the consultation and actually talk to the experts and say: "What is happening? How will this have impacts? Who will this impact? What will the effects be?" I think it's pretty clear that this government hasn't done the homework. I think it's pretty clear that this government isn't able to provide those answers.

We've seen a couple of government members get up in this place and instead of actually addressing any of the questions – I know we've listed quite a long list of questions here. The government will have the opportunity to go back through *Hansard* or the Blues later, Mr. Speaker, and look at those questions in writing, and they could bring them back to this place if we continue debating this for some time. But I think it's pretty clear that the government at this time isn't able to answer almost any of those questions, because the government members that have gotten up in this place, instead of actually trying to engage in the debate, instead of trying to engage in the actual policy points, instead of actually trying to engage in the understanding of how this bill will affect their constituents, have gotten up and either voiced platitudes or personal attacks on

members of the opposition, and I think that's something that's quite disappointing.

I think it's something that we see as a habit from this government, that they are prepared to push forward their bills without proper debate, that they are prepared to push forward with their bills like this without actually speaking to the policy points, without actually speaking to the questions that this opposition has. I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that we are all sent here to ask those questions, that private members of this House, whether you are in the government or opposition caucuses, are sent here to ask difficult questions and say: what value am I getting for my constituents? When the government asks to spend \$600,000 of my constituents' money, I would like to know what value they're offering, right? I think that's a very fair question that every single private member in this place should have.

I think it's a very fair question to say: how will this actually reduce rural, urban, suburban, intercity crime, all these types of crime? What are the actual outcomes that an Alberta-based parole board will have that the Parole Board of Canada did not already have, right? We know that this program already exists. It's been operating for many, many years here, the Parole Board of Canada. It has been doing its job, Mr. Speaker. The government has not suggested that the Parole Board of Canada was unable to fulfill their duties in this way, was insufficient in this way, so what has changed now that an Alberta parole board will do differently? What is going to create these suddenly new outcomes? Is it going to be things like different criteria for parole? Is it going to be things like targeting different reoffend rates? Is it going to be things like trying to have different programming associated with parolees? We don't know, and the government isn't willing to actually have those conversations and answer those questions.

4:30

I think it's important, when we talk about these issues, when we talk about these complex justice issues that are going to have impacts on every single one of our communities, that we can understand before we vote on this legislation. Before we vote for this legislation, we should have the ability to understand: what are the actual intents? Without knowing who's going to be on the board, why the board is structured the way it is, without knowing how much the board is going to be paid, without knowing what criteria the board will be using, without knowing any of these things, it becomes very hard to make a values judgment of whether this board will actually accomplish more and will get us a better return on our money than the Parole Board of Canada did, right?

For a government that introduced its own Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, for a government that actually touts so heavily that they want to increase the efficiency of government, it seems like it's actually introducing inefficiencies if they can't explain how this is not creating redundant services. We need to have a real conversation about: what is the intent? What is the goal? What is the purpose? Because every single piece of legislation we bring to this place, well, especially in this case – it's going to cost us \$600,000, right? It's going to cost us real money. It's going to cost Albertans real money, and this government hasn't provided any examples of why it will reduce crime, hasn't provided any examples of how it will affect parolees, hasn't provided any examples of who they've consulted with and how they determined that this was actually a good idea. It hasn't provided any examples of how it will differ from the existing programs that are currently operating.

In that case, Mr. Speaker, it becomes very difficult for the opposition to move forward this legislation because until those questions are answered, until we can understand what the actual outcomes are going to be, until we understand what the economic impacts will be, until we understand who this government talked to,

what the police services think, what the judiciary thinks, what the prosecutors and the defence attorneys think, until we can understand if the government did any of those consultations, it seems like the government hasn't done their homework.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and the hon. member that caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not exactly in the same chair that I usually am, so I can see the confusion. I was curious on a couple of issues that the hon. member had touched on but perhaps could elaborate on to some degree. The first one is concerning the parole board composition and the people that would be taking those positions. Especially in the light of concerns around diversity in our communities, I think, in regard to how this issue has been top of mind for everyone, really, here in North America and around the world over the last short while, you know, to suggest that we don't have work to do around diversity and the recognition of diversity and to be seen to have those positions of authority taken by different cultural groups – this Alberta parole board act, I think, provides a good opportunity for us to show and demonstrate diversity in positions of authority in the province of Alberta and with a parole board. I mean, I have a number of questions around this whole Alberta parole board act that I will elucidate on in the next opportunity I do have. But I'm just curious if the hon. member could perhaps talk about that a little bit. I know that he represents quite a diverse community in suburban Edmonton, and I think he would have something that could be useful to talk about on that.

The other issue, again, just to be brief, is around the \$600,000 that it's estimated to cost to build this. When I heard the CBC interview, the initial interview with the Justice minister introducing this bill to the public, it was suggested that maybe only 50 people would be typically accessing this board. You know, 50 people for \$600,000: I know I'm not super good at math, but that's, like, \$12,000 per case, right? I mean, again, I don't know a whole lot about parole boards and parole board hearings and the process and the cost, but just doing that simple math of \$12,000 per case – I would just like to highlight that, and if the member could elucidate on that as well, please.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South, with about two minutes.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, I think that's a really important question from my colleague from Edmonton-North West here, when he speaks about the composition of the board. I spent quite a bit of time in the last term and I continue to spend quite a bit of time speaking to groups who are adversely affected by many inner-city problems here in Edmonton, particularly in the Chinatown area, where I've worked with many of my stakeholders and my friends and my colleagues as well. When we talk about these issues, we know that the federal parole board is required to have a diversity aspect in the composition of its members, right? They are required to actually reflect the diversity here in Canada.

What is not shown in this bill – and perhaps the minister would like to speak to some of that – is that there is no diversity requirement for the Alberta parole board, right? That means that if we're talking about issues in Chinatown, for example, there would be no representation required for people from the Chinese community or there'd be no representation required for people from the indigenous community. There would be no representation required from any of those minority communities because this legislation just doesn't speak to it, right?

It's this lack of understanding, it's this lack of actual consultation with the communities, it's this lack of engagement with the actual communities affected that I think are going to be the hiccups in this bill, that are going to really cause the problems with this bill. Mr. Speaker, it is so important, when we talk about antiracism, when we talk about things like the Alberta parole board and moving forward this legislation, that it addresses those issues because, especially as we look globally right now, we look at our global perspective, and it is becoming more and more clear that we need to have real conversations about how racism affects our communities.

We need to have real conversations about how we can fight racism right here at home as well as abroad, and you don't do that by cutting antiracism grants, and you certainly don't do that by creating redundant systems that will no longer reflect the diversity of Albertans and Canadians. It appears that the government just hasn't really thought about that. It hasn't thought about how that will have impacts.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

To join debate, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to take some minutes to speak to Bill 18, Alberta parole board act, here in second reading this afternoon. I think that many of the points taken and made by other members of the Official Opposition caucus – I share some concerns as well. I mean, I certainly do support the notion that we always will endeavour as a legislative body to make this province safer and secure. I think those are sort of the foundational elements of what governance is – right? – to provide that security and safety and surety around safety and security to the population. I mean, that's a foundation which, you know, all societies and governments must be responsible to, right? So when we are looking at making modifications to the justice system, we keep that at the back of our minds, but we also must make sure that the administration of justice is just that, that it's just and it's timely and it's providing the due process that all Canadians are entitled to.

Again I confess my relative ignorance of the parole system and how it does operate. I know that there are some other jurisdictions that do run some level of provincial parole boards in concurrence or working together with the national parole board system. I know that in building legislation, it's always a good idea to look for best practices from other jurisdictions to make sure that you can learn from their experience, to make something that will work here in Alberta. So to what degree I would – again, I'm going to just probably ask a series of questions here, open-ended questions, because in second reading we want to try to get a scope of where and what the legislation will do. We can seek clarity from the minister or from his staff to ensure that we have a full understanding of what we're voting for.

4:40

My first question is on whether or not the ministry and the minister and his department did a crossjurisdictional study to see what is happening in other places. I know that both Ontario and Quebec, I think, have some facsimile of a provincial board. I mean, again, I would like to know more about that to see how those do function in working together with the national parole board because I think, you know, we want to make sure that if we are introducing something like an Alberta provincial parole board, we are working in harmony and using the resources prudently with the national board, too, right? We can't just presume we're building one for the other.

In fact, the scope of this one, as it's outlined in Bill 18, would suggest that we're only talking about, you know, people that have

been sentenced to less than two years for an infraction, I believe, right? Of course, you have to naturally work with the federal Criminal Code and the federal parole board still because there are many people that will be in a situation that would exceed two years of a sentence, for example. That's one thing I wanted to ask about, for sure.

Again, as I sort of pointed out very quickly in the 29(2)(a) from the previous speaker, when the question was asked from the minister when he was briefing the media on this bill, they said that there would be maybe 50 people that would be in a category that would be accessing this in this year. You know, I just thought to myself: 50 people for 600,000 bucks. I mean, it just didn't seem – maybe that's how much parole procedures cost. I don't know. But if perhaps we could have an answer from the minister and the ministry, if this is actually good value for money and what the cost of other parole procedures might be, just by way of comparison.

Again I also just wanted to express my concern around the composition of such a board. I think it's very important for us to not just be conscious of diversity but to be demonstrating an active commitment to diversity here in the province of Alberta when we do agencies, boards, and commissions, to make sure that people can see themselves reflected in agencies, boards, and commissions and indeed all levels of governance and so forth here in the province of Alberta so that, let's say, young people or people of all ages can see demonstrably that their culture, their place in our society are reflected in appointments. I think that's absolutely a necessity in this day and age. It always has been, but, you know, I think that now more than ever we can all see the importance for us to act on building a more just and equitable society. Part of that is to have a reflection of the composition of our society in the positions of authority in which we function here in the province of Alberta. I think, then, again, that's an area that we need to do.

I mean, we need to know that when we're talking about moving some level or degree of power from a federal system to the province, we're doing it to solve the problem or to solve the issue or the challenge for which that thing is designed. In this case, it's parole. If we want to build something that is more smoothly functioning, that is more just, that is more equitable, that does execute justice with all of those values and makes it function in a timely manner, then those are all good things. I just want to know with some clarity that that's exactly what we're doing here with this Bill 18, that it's not just a rhetorical device.

You know, I think I heard the minister talk about “less Ottawa, more Alberta” several, many times in the last 24 hours in regard to this bill, which is a fine slogan, but is that an extension of the proper administration of justice? I don't know. I mean, I would like to see clarification on that as well.

I mean, if you want to talk about less Ottawa, more Alberta – right? – that's all fine and dandy, but then you have to have that demonstrated in your actions, Mr. Speaker. You can't just say those things and then, you know, take CERB money for your political party and all of that kind of thing. I mean, people are smart in Alberta, and hypocrisy is something that we're all very sensitive towards. So, you know, just make sure you're careful that what you say and what you do line up somehow because people are listening and they do make those evaluations.

Just some specific questions that I had around Bill 18. I wanted to know – again, I think many people have asked, but I'll ask again. I'm just curious to know who they have consulted with in regard to Bill 18, and what was the result of that consultation? I think that is just basic practice in modern governance and to not just say that you consulted but to demonstrate the information that you did, you know, ascertain from that consultation and then how you applied it

to the bill, the potential law that you're potentially bringing forward.

I'm curious to know as well in terms of the number of applications under two years and under the parameters that are received each year. I know that I got that one answer from the presser from yesterday or the day before. You know, I was kind of surprised to hear how few people were actually maybe impacted by this thing, and I just want to know more about that.

I'm curious why you've made choices around quorum for this bill, only having a board of five and then quorum at two. I mean, in my experience in building and administering agencies, boards, and commissions, that just seems like an extraordinary number. Perhaps there's a normal explanation for that, but I'd certainly like to hear what that is.

I'm curious to know what sort of pay the board members would be receiving, and how would that compare to the national parole board compensation that takes place? I'd like to know: what are the conditions or the parameters around granting parole from this body if it does come into being? And I'm curious to know if the intention is to, you know, focus on particular types of crime. Again, I'm perhaps demonstrating my lack of understanding of parole and how it comes forward, but are you focusing on particular types of crime and so forth and things like that?

You know, we know that, like I said at the beginning of my remarks, our number one job as a government is to provide for the safety and security of individuals. Are we fulfilling that or strengthening that through Bill 18, or are we sort of bleeding off into other areas that I think still need to be talked about – right? – like hiring more police officers, hiring more prosecution? I think that that's a big problem here in the province of Alberta, and I know we had the government talking big talk about that. But have we and are we hiring more prosecutors in this province, and is it going to allow for the more timely execution of justice in our province?

I mean, perhaps building capacity in the parole boards in the province might be able to do that, but, you know, if you're going to do something like this, you should probably have a measurement of a projection of how you might – are you going to speed up the court process by doing this, or are you going to perhaps review more cases and so forth? I would like to know more about all of those things before I could make an accurate decision about this particular bill.

You know, I'm curious as well, like, in terms of the victims' portal that they have here in the province of Alberta now. Is that going to be changed somehow? The victims' portal does not replace the existing process of notifying victims by mail. It's another way to access information. I'm just curious to know if that has been changed as a result of this bill as well.

4:50

In conclusion, you know, I certainly would like to see us making Alberta a more safe and secure place. We know that crime is always in the back of people's minds. To ensure that we provide adequate deterrents from crime as well I think is absolutely necessary, but you need to make sure that you are not just, maybe, trying to address it with rhetorical flourish but you actually are putting boots on the ground. It's expensive to provide adequate policing in the province, for example, but there's no way around it. I mean, you can't just say that you want to get tough on crime and not spend the money that is commensurate with actually reducing crime in our society.

I know that this has been an ongoing issue. I mean, I've been speaking in this Legislature for a number of different terms, and it always comes up, the issue around crime. But I've also noticed that the degree to which a government is willing to commit resources to actually reducing crime and making the courts function in a more

smooth and timely manner and so forth: those are the actual events that actually bear results, right? Just talking about it or, you know, saying: more Ottawa, less – no. Sorry. More Alberta; less Ottawa. I mean, that doesn't make anybody safer, necessarily. I think that Albertans are wise and smart enough to realize the difference.

I think that when we talk about the composition of a provincial parole board, it's imperative that we have strong consultation and representation with both Métis and indigenous communities here in the province. We know that we have a disproportionate number of persons from indigenous and Métis communities that are part of the justice system, considering the overall population. It's absolutely imperative that people can see themselves reflected in the justice system at all levels from police to judges and lawyers and then parole board members as well. That is an investment in trust as much as it is an investment in understanding and experience that people can bring to the table.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will just be interested to hear other people debate on Bill 18, and I am very happy to consider the insights of everyone. Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Member for Edmonton-North West, as it is now – right?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. North West.

Member Loyola: Edmonton-North West. As he mentioned previously, he has had a considerable amount of experience in this House. I was hoping that reflecting on this particular bill and the experience that he's had, if he could just highlight a little bit more and share with us some more insights from his experience.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, sure, I would be happy to, to the degree that I'm able, I guess. Yeah. You know, I mean, I guess – again, this is less a function of the bill, specifically. But in political tactics in general I've seen it on more than one occasion, where – well, I know that this was part of the UCP platform, right? It's good to move through your platform and fulfill your campaign promises. That's absolutely important, but I think that this was part of, if we can say what the core of the campaign promise was, to reduce crime and talk about rural crime and so forth.

As I said before, I mean, this is sort of the option where, you know, it's not cheap – it's \$600,000 – but to actually get at, I think, the essence of due process in our judicial system and then making our province safer, then you're dealing with exponentially larger sums to hire more police officers, to hire more prosecutors, and expedite the judicial process. This is kind of, sort of the fringe version of choice to make. You know, I would encourage the government, if they want to get at the core, that you have to make those hard choices and invest in, as I say, police officers and prosecutors and judges and capacity as well.

Yeah. I mean, certainly, I won't speculate on the intentions of the government with this, but, you know, there are things that we need to do in concert with perhaps increasing parole board capacity. Again, as I said before, if the minister and the ministry and the department can, like, give us a speculation of: how much more capacity would this provide for us by making this bill into action, and how much would it help to provide justice for Albertans? They

must have been able to quantify it somehow. You don't just make a bill and say, "Well, we'll hope for the best" kind of thing. I mean, it has to have some projection into the future in that regard.

The other issue that I can't stress enough – again, maybe this is a good way to demonstrate a commitment to a more equitable and just society. You know, Albertans were very interested in building antiracism strategies for years in this province. It's not a new phenomenon. I was disappointed to see that perhaps we're losing some traction on building antiracism strategies and actually making investments into that initiative. Maybe this parole board composition thing is a way to kind of start to send a message that that might get turned around, because time is of the essence.

You know, we always like to think: oh, well, we're not like the States. We watch the terrible things that are happening in the States, and we go: oh, well, it's not like us. But, I mean, we have systematic problems around racism here in our province and our country, too, right? To suggest that we don't would be putting your head in the sand. These things can always take on a degree of intensity at different times based on what things might be happening. If we might think, "Oh, well, that could never happen here," well, let's make sure that it doesn't happen here by providing the education, by providing the leadership, by providing actual places in positions of authority on agencies and boards and commissions to demonstrate a commitment to equality and justice and not just talk about it once a year. I think that we're at one of those crossroad places where, yeah, we don't want to be like the States, but you don't have positive change without making a concerted effort. You just can't kind of cross your fingers and hope for the best.

So here we are with Bill 18 and the composition of this provincial parole board. I mean, the jury is still out – ha, there you go; jury – as to whether this is good or not, but we'll soon see.

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, returning to the bill proper, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to debate.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all the members for their patience this afternoon and being so open and willing to engage in debate, of course. In order to contribute more to our debate, I would like to contribute, actually, a report that was done in October 2018 by the Institute for Research on Public Policy called Rethinking Criminal Justice in Canada. Of course, I will be happy to table this tomorrow. It's a round-table report, but just to give it a little bit of background here, the Institute for Research on Public Policy was founded in 1972.

The Institute for Research on Public Policy is an independent, national, bilingual, not-for-profit organization. The IRPP seeks to improve public policy in Canada by generating research, providing insight and informing debate on current and emerging policy issues facing Canadians and their governments.

Just to give a background on that.

The specific reason why I wanted to highlight from this particular report is that they actually did round-table discussions across the country, and one of the localities is actually right here in Edmonton.

They understand that there definitely needs to be a considerable amount of reform when it comes to the criminal justice system, and I wanted to be able to contribute those in today's debate. In terms of suggestions related to policy, I'm just going to go through the list that they provide here in the report and share that with everybody.

5:00

Number 1 is "acknowledge that fundamental reform is needed." Number 2: "articulate values and principles that should guide the criminal justice system in the 21st century, including how they

relate to punishment and rehabilitation.” Number 3: “acknowledge that individuals are a product of their surroundings and invest in preventive measures,” which I hope to come back to before the end of my time. Number 4: “acknowledge that the criminal justice system has a more negative impact on certain demographic groups and address the specific needs of those groups.” Number 5: “acknowledge that systemic racism exists, and outline specific steps that can be taken to remedy it.” Number 6: “consider increasing the use of alternative and restorative justice programs.”

Number 7: “reconsider the structure of the criminal justice system and the interactions of the many actors involved by putting the individual at the centre.” Number 8: “aim to make the criminal justice system ‘smaller’ and create more space for social system interventions.” Number 9: “be developed and implemented in full collaboration with the provinces and territories, as well as Indigenous leaders and governments.” Number 10: “include real public engagement to build trust in the criminal justice system and support for the reforms.” Number 11, the final one, is “consider building a learning component into the criminal justice system through additional research capacity, information sharing and ongoing adjustments to the system’s behaviour based on best practices.”

Mr. Speaker, in terms of further contributions to this debate, what I would like to do is begin based on the premise that was highlighted in point 3, and that is that people are a product of their environment. Now, I understand that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is frustrated because of the economy. We, too, are incredibly frustrated by the current condition of the economy. When we are putting forward suggestions for legislation, we need to understand the implications that specific bills, proposed legislation, will indeed have on the populace because that is, of course, who we are here to serve, and we’re here to govern on their behalf.

It’s really important for me that when addressing this issue and understanding the frustrations that we all have with the economy and the fact that we’re living through a time, an economic crisis, which was already on the horizon before the coronavirus pandemic actually further impacted the reality that we’re all facing right now, it’s important to understand that there are a variety of factors that have contributed to the current economic condition. Though I respect that as partisan entities we enter into this House and debate and we tend to fall back on our talking points at times, I believe that all of us – and I include myself in this – need to raise the level of debate, especially when it comes to issues like the one that we have in front of us, which, of course, is Bill 18, Corrections (Alberta Parole Board) Amendment Act, 2020, and provide a little bit more insight beyond the rhetoric, that partisan rhetoric. Essentially, what we’re talking about are people who are impacted by crime but also the individuals who are committing those crimes.

I hope that it would be our desire that we choose to rehabilitate these individuals that are committing these crimes, and we also want to – and I know that this is not often the most widely held opinion, but at the end of the day these individuals that are committing these crimes are no less human than anybody else within this province. Now, I’m not saying that that gives them a free ride. They need to be held responsible for their actions, yes. But I would hope that as a government and as a society we would want to rehabilitate that member of our community because, of course, that member is an individual, is part of a family, potentially could be a father, might be a brother, obviously is the son to someone. Essentially, what I’m trying to get at is that this is a human being, and they have certain rights. I understand that when committing a crime, there are certain rights that they give up because of that, but it doesn’t mean that they are any less human.

I want to get back to that premise, then, of what I want to contribute to this debate, that people are a product of their environment. I understand that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is frustrated because, you know, we’re contributing to the debate the issues of poverty and housing specifically, but the reason why we’re doing that is because if you want to get tough on crime – I understand that you want to get tough on crime – then get tough on what’s causing poverty because that is the root cause of the crime. Now, I’m not saying that because someone is poor it gives them the right to commit crime. I’m not saying that.

What I’m saying is that the environment, the disparity that exists within our society – the inequity is the real injustice here. The inequity that people face in our society and the fact that that same economy that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland and the rest of us in this House are concerned about, our economy that is in crisis at this moment, is a major factor in the fact that people are not able to meet their basic needs. Then we as a government through our social programs, through financial assistance – these programs are absolutely essential so that we can make sure that people are not falling through the cracks. Now, this is just the economic analysis.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, I’d like to continue by going on with the fact that the same social determinants of health also apply to crime and the criminal justice system. What I’m getting at is the fact that there’s a large majority of Albertans that are in penal institutions suffering from some kind of mental illness or substance abuse. Now, when it comes to substance abuse, I know that some people have the opinion that, well, you blame the person who’s actually going through it or is actually abusing these substances. But, members, I want to encourage you – I want to encourage you – to understand that with that substance abuse, the individual that is turning towards drugs and alcohol or whatever else it is that’s feeding the vice is actually trying to cover up some kind of trauma. That is the root problem. Now, as a society I would hope that we would invest dollars, then, into addressing these issues of this disparity and the fact that people are turning to substance abuse as a way of dealing with that trauma.

Now, you couple that trauma – and the tendency is, Mr. Speaker, that people who live below the poverty line, who may be suffering from a mental illness and then, on top of that, are abusing substances, are the people that are going to be adversely affected, and those are going to be the people that are actually going to commit crime. That’s the tendency. I’m not saying that it is all the time, but that is the tendency. So I reiterate to all the members of this House, then, that if we want to get tough on crime, then we also need to deal with these issues.

5:10

You can pour money into addressing the symptoms of this problem. Like in health, you can pour money into – and we need to. Do not get me wrong. Do not misunderstand me. We need to, for example, in health have more doctors, more health professionals, more hospitals. We need that, but you also need to invest that money into mental health and addressing the root problems that I was talking about in terms of substance abuse and dealing with problems of mental illness in our society.

We can pour money into police and prisons. We can pour money into that, but then we also need, under the critical analysis of the social determinants of health, that also apply to crime, Mr. Speaker, to invest dollars in addressing addictions and mental illness. By investing money there, we’ll be able to also complement the investments that we make on the other side of it, addressing the symptoms of those very same problems.

I'd like to believe that this is a genuine and authentic contribution to this debate. Now, I understand that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is frustrated when we get up and talk about these things because of course, you know, his main focus is the economy, but know that ours is as well. I'm sure the members of this House have heard me say this before, that an economy needs to serve the people and not the people serving the economy. That's what we're here to do, Mr. Speaker, to govern on behalf of the people of Alberta. We need to make wise decisions that are going to be able to contribute to addressing the root problems when it comes to crime in the province of Alberta.

Like I was saying, more investments need to be put into supports for mental health and addictions and not just pouring that money into police and prisons although we need to dedicate to that as well. One, I would say, complements the other, but we cannot forget about addressing those root causes. You know, I'm sure that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland agrees with me, and I understand his frustration, but know that perhaps because of our different priorities, we want to dedicate more taxpayer dollars to one end of the problem than the other. Indeed, I hope you would agree with me that by investing in all of these, we're addressing the problem. We're actually creating solutions to the problem.

Now, several members of this House have gotten up and spoken at length . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is rising under 29(2)(a). I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader might be rising to adjourn debate. Unfortunately, she's unable to do so during 29(2)(a). So if the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland would like to provide a comment, he would be able to do so at this time.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll make it brief. MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I really appreciate your comments, bringing your decorum, through you to him, Mr. Speaker, bringing the level of decorum back down here, recognizing that there are frustrations, and that regardless of political stripes or otherwise we are looking at a broader solution. The economy is definitely one of them.

One of the things I would like to, you know, try to talk about here is the substance abuse issue. The MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie may have missed my commentary yesterday. It was in regard to an Edmonton police force member that actually resides in my area but works here. At a town hall meeting where our minister had attended, after about an hour of this dialogue with everyone there at the meeting – there were about 400 or 500 people – he told us that we don't have a rural crime issue, that what we have is a drug issue.

When you look at the root causes of these things, out in our area I have the Paul band, and when I first started consulting and going around as a politician and talking to them, one of the things that they had was a drug issue out on the reservation, out there on their lands. Now, when I started looking at their roads and infrastructure, they were beat up, Mr. Speaker. I mean, you've got 50 klicks of roads. You can't get access in there. You can't do this; you can't do that. They literally have in the old town gang members who have set up, and they're actually cooking a lot of these substances that end up down in the streets in Edmonton. There's literally the Pony Express, if you would, of connections to the downtown core, to Chinatown, to those areas where most of the substance abuse is taking place.

Now, the folks from the Paul band, the chief and council are frustrated as all get-out. They're honest, hard-working folks. They want to do the best things for their community, and they feel the sense of lawlessness and helplessness that's in that area. Now, when

we spoke about this, not once did they ask for a handout, Mr. Speaker. What they asked for for help was an RCMP officer. Now, I went and started looking at this, and the reason why we didn't have an RCMP officer is that one time there was a gap in funding between provincial and federal, and all of a sudden they weren't having crime issues out there because they had a constable. Well, then they took the constable away, and – what do you know? – they have these crime issues. It's a cascading effect when you go down the rabbit hole and you follow these things, because they are interrelated.

When I went and looked at the Stony Plain courthouse, because chief and council told me that there was a judge out there that also had seen a big spike in this area, approximately 30 per cent of the court load is related specifically with that one group, with the Paul band.

So if I'm looking at economics and I'm looking at root cause, as the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie had noted a couple of times, I'm looking at it with a different lens. If I'm going to solve the problem, all the drug issues that are taking place, that's a downward cycle, what I have to do is to find the resources to allocate towards the root cause. The root cause is that we didn't have the money for the RCMP officer, we didn't have the money for the roads, which therein led to this state, and now that's where we're at.

When it comes down to the downtown area and dealing with the root cause, just because we look at it with a different lens doesn't mean we're not caring people. It doesn't mean that we want to help folks. It doesn't mean that we want to stop the cycle. But to simply stick our heads in the sand and mask over it and suggest that it's only one solution or the other is inaccurate and incorrect.

Again I thank the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for the decorum on it. I really appreciate his involvement in the debate and what he's brought here. Again I want to make sure that he rests assured that I'm not a one-trick pony. I'm not just looking at one thing, but I am trying to get to the root cause, because my training in industry: when there's an incident or something else, it's called root cause analysis. You look at the underlying factors, but you get to the root cause, and then you look at mitigative actions to take care of it to make sure it doesn't happen again. That's the sense of frustration when we broil down to partisan politics and we start throwing these other things out rather than working as a group to solve the problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. member for – sorry. We're on 29(2)(a). Are you hoping to join the debate on 29(2)(a)?

Is there anyone else wishing to provide a question or comment on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we are back on the main bill. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika, I believe, may have a motion to make.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to rise on this bill. I don't really have a lot to say. I think we've had a lot of great, robust debate today. With that, I'd like to adjourn debate on Bill 18.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate May 28: Mr. Hunter]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to join in the debate of second reading of Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 2, the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020. I think it's an act that is very interesting because it's an act that the UCP government is bringing forward that intends to change how Albertans are going to be able to use and enjoy the public parks and public spaces we have here in our province.

Mr. Speaker, as you know and as Albertans know, Albertans love their public parks. They love using their public spaces and want the government to do everything possible to make those spaces more accessible and more enjoyable. We've even seen this summer that despite the restrictions, Albertans are spending a great deal of time in our parks and a great deal of time outdoors as that's a great way to get some energy out.

5:20

It's interesting because we look at this legislation and we look at the intent of this legislation, which is to try and have the sort of enjoyability in our parks increased, yet we mix that with the closure and privatization of so many of these spaces. It's interesting because it's a juxtaposition of those agendas, Mr. Speaker. It's an agenda that has no support of Albertans. In fact, Albertans are up in arms about the closure or partial closure in some cases, that we've already seen happening, of 20 parks and the privatization of another 164 parks. The very spaces that we're talking about in this bill, that Albertans may have been able to use, that Albertans may have been able to go out and enjoy and spend time in on a day like today, which is beautiful outdoors and outside, and it's sunny. Many people would like to have gone outside. Instead, what they're going to be seeing is their recreation spaces literally being torn down – right? – spaces literally having the signs boarded up and the facilities bulldozed over. That's what we're seeing.

This juxtaposition of this government trying to say, "Oh, we're here for the public enjoyment, we're trying to improve public spaces, and we want people to go out and have fun" and, on the other hand, privatizing it and giving it away to corporations and closing these public spaces so Albertans cannot actually use those spaces is very interesting, because our public parks are a treasure. It's interesting that this government is so entrenched in their ideological agenda – they're so entrenched in their ideological agenda – that they're willing to be antidemocratic, something that's deeply unpopular and unacceptable, and go after these public spaces, right? It's interesting that they try to use the cover of the pandemic to dismantle our public systems, dismantle our public parks, and then come in and say: well, we should have some fun while we do it, right?

Mr. Speaker, I think it's really interesting because this bill, Bill 2, doesn't actually accomplish any of those goals because while they're trying to go in and dismantle our systems, dismantle our parks, they are trying to hide it with this bill, right? They are using this bill to hide their true agenda, the ideological agenda, the ideology that Albertans don't deserve these public resources, that Albertans don't deserve these public parks and don't deserve to have access to them. That's why this government has this blatant hypocrisy between the two agendas that they're pushing forward – this blatant hypocrisy – because right now, when Albertans need these public spaces more than ever, they need the opportunity to be able to go out and have these distant spaces and these outdoor public spaces that are going to be safe, that are going to be enjoyable throughout the summer where these restrictions remain in place.

Instead of being able to go out and enjoy things like having a glass of wine, as what has been proposed in this bill, Mr. Speaker, we're going to be seeing the majority of those parks, 20 of those parks, closed or partially closed and an additional 164 of these parks privatized, right? That's what we're actually talking about when we

move forward with legislation like this in this Assembly. What we're actually talking about is that there seems to be this dichotomy of what the government says they want to do, which is encourage Albertans to use public spaces, and that's what this bill is. That's what the government is saying when they introduce bills like this, but what they actually do seems to be the opposite, right? They say Albertans should go out and use public spaces, enjoy the parks, and go out and have a beer or whatever it is. Instead, on the other hand, then they go and actually close the spaces that this would propose they use, right?

It's hypocritical of this government. It's hypocritical of this government to tell Albertans in the middle of a pandemic they should have less access to public spaces, less access to public spaces that they should be enjoying, that this government is saying that they should be enjoying, by introducing bills like this, right? That's the pure hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker, we know it's wildly unpopular, right? We have petitions that thousands of people have signed to this environment minister saying not to close these parks. The environment minister gets up and he says: "Well, you know what? That's great. That's great. We know Albertans don't want the parks to be closed, but what they can do is that they can go have a beer in them before we close them and sell them off." That's basically what this minister is telling Albertans right now. It's absolutely ludicrous. It's absolutely ludicrous that this is reasonable to this government, that this government is willing to ignore the cries of so many people, that this government is willing to ignore the protections that we have for our public spaces, that this government is willing to ignore how valuable these public spaces are for Albertans.

This government doesn't have its priorities straight, Mr. Speaker. What they have is an ideological agenda, and they're ideologically blind to how hypocritical they are. It's true. It's true that this government really doesn't seem to understand that when they do one thing, they can't say another, right? They don't actually comprehend that making our public parks a better place, which this bill purports to do, that making our parks more enjoyable for Albertans and more accessible for Albertans, which this bill purports to do – they need to actually stop and look and say: are we actually accomplishing that? Because they aren't. What they're doing is that they're closing the parks. What they're doing is that they're privatizing the parks. They're selling them off. What they're doing is that they're making them less accessible for Albertans, making them less enjoyable for Albertans because there are going to be fewer of them, right?

It's pretty obvious, Mr. Speaker, that this is an ideological sell-off. This is something that is based only in their Conservative ideology. It has no place in reasoning, and it's shocking. It's shocking because the government will not even stop to consider what those priorities should be. They won't even stop to consider why they are moving forward with this legislation, right? The private members get up in this place, and they spout talking points that have been crafted for them, but they don't even get up and talk about the actual impacts that we'll have in terms of when we close the parks that are being discussed in this bill. That's the most surprising thing. The most surprising thing is that private members here will not even get up in this place and talk about how important these spaces are for their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, it's going to be interesting because we're talking about a bill that says that it's okay to consume certain types of substances like alcohol inside of public parks, right? So we're talking about supporting our industries like our small brewers, supporting our industries across this province, but while we're doing that, while we're trying to support our industries, as the government purports they're trying to do, they're going to make it

harder and harder for Albertans to actually enjoy that. They're going to make it harder and harder for Albertans to actually go out and do the things that would be required to support them.

It is shocking that this government does not understand that you can't do one thing and say another. It's pretty clear that they don't understand the implications of the actions they're taking, that the government will not do their homework. The government simply does not care about the issues, or – Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't presume what the government thinks – they have not done their homework. They either don't understand or they don't care, right? It comes down to it. It comes down to that.

We've seen time and time again: right now Albertans want to use their parks more than ever. You can see it on the grounds here in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. You can see it in front of this very place, a public place. You can see it. If you step on the balcony right now, you can see people walking around and trying to enjoy those outdoor spaces, right? And this bill is supposed to make it easier for Albertans to enjoy those spaces, so why, on the other hand, is this government making fewer spaces available? Why is this government, on the other hand, privatizing 167...

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

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. Correction. The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. You're basically the same person.

Point of Order

Relevance

Items Previously Decided

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I've listened intently, looking for the member opposite to provide some debate on the current bill, and I have heard him speak at least four or five times, say the same thing over and over again, which really has nothing to do with the bill, to tell you the truth.

Under 23(b) it says: "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." Now, the question under discussion is Bill 2. Also, under (c), "persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session," the thing that he's actually talking about is a decision that was made prior to this bill. It's already done. It's finished. It's closed.

I would be very interested to hear any other issues that he has with this bill. In fact, I'd like to hear at least once whether he is for or against this bill. So far, what he has said is that this government is closing down a bunch of parks, which isn't true. Because of that, he says that this is hypocritical, but in reality, Mr. Speaker, the issue that he is talking about has already been dealt with before. I would love to have the member get back to the point of Bill 2, the debate of Bill 2.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has a comment to make with respect to the point of order.

Member Loyola: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the hon. member here. He quoted Standing Order 23(b) and (c). I believe that we're all very familiar with the MO of our dear friend from Edmonton-South. You know, although he does engage in repetition from time to time, Mr. Speaker, he does eventually get to his point. I'm pretty sure that he was getting there, and in the past you've provided considerable leeway to him. I would hope that you provide that for him again.

I don't really believe that we have a point of order here, and if we could allow the member to continue, I would appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

The Speaker: I'm sure that now the Member for Cardston-Siksika knows that a point of order is not to be used for debate. Presumably he has something different to add than the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, so I'll allow some opportunity for him to provide that; however, if he doesn't have anything different to add, I will interject as I'm pretty close to being ready to rule.

Mr. Schow: Most certainly, Mr. Speaker. I always have something of substance to add to this debate. I would also like to argue that there is persistence and needless repetition. I just feel that the Member for Edmonton-South may have lost pages two and three of his talking points because I've heard the same argument three times in a rotation. I just want to add that on record.

The Speaker: I appreciate the submission although I'm not sure what you added that was new to the point of order.

I am prepared to rule on the point of order. While I am very familiar with the MO of the Member for Edmonton-South, I'm not really that interested in what it may or may not be. What I am interested in is ensuring that the House is able to robustly debate issues before the Assembly. Given that this is the second speaker to this bill, members may not appreciate the debating style and the ways that the hon. member chooses to make a point, but he certainly has the right to make it. While he does so very differently than I would, I would say that literally 11 minutes into the debate to suggest that someone is being repetitive is, I'm not entirely sure, salient to the point of order. As such, this is not a point of order, and the hon. member is more than welcome to proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to continue and speak to, I think, some of the importance of understanding the qualities of this bill. I think that when we talk about the qualities of this bill and we talk about what's actually being brought forward in it, we can see that the majority of what this bill brings forward – of course, as I've already stated prior, it does nothing because so many parks are being closed and privatized. Indeed, the majority of the points in this bill have been implemented in policy in the past few years.

When we talk about things like improving the access to permits and licensing and different things like that, it turns out that the majority of these aspects under Treasury Board and Finance were already being implemented in policy under the NDP government last term. When we look at that, we wonder, perhaps, why the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is introducing this bill. We wonder, perhaps, why the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is sponsoring this bill when it would seem to be more of a Treasury Board and Finance bill. As we know, AGLC is a Treasury Board and Finance branch, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps Albertans will start to wonder what the purpose of a \$10 million budget for the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is, right? Perhaps Albertans will start to wonder why we're letting the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction spend \$10 million when he's introducing bills that were already being implemented in policy.

We're talking about a bill that accomplishes what was already being done and now is being redundantly brought forward by a minister whose stated ministry is to reduce redundancies, right? That's the really interesting thing we have here, that this minister is not only bringing forward a bill that does not actually accomplish any of its stated goals because they have already closed, in his own words, several parks, up to 20 parks, closed or partially closed 20 parks, and ideologically privatized 164 others. Mr. Speaker, in his

own words, closed. As he raised in that point of order, some of them were already closed. It was already settled, in his own words. Now also his \$10 million ministry is bringing in a redundant bill that is already and was already being implemented in policy.

Maybe the minister can rise in this place. Instead of rising on a frivolous point of order, Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister could rise in this place and explain how this bill is an effective use of his ministry's time, how this bill actually brings forward different things that were not already being moved forward, how this ministry is actually being effective in accomplishing its stated goals. It would appear that Albertans will no longer have access to these parks and already do not have access to these parks because they are being ideologically privatized, because they are being closed, because they are partially closed. When we see that this is what's already happening, perhaps this minister could explain how he's spending \$10 million of Albertans' money to reduce redundancies when he's bringing forward a bill that was already accomplished in the vast majority of places through regulation, right? That's the real question that this minister needs to bring forward.

In fact, as we know, AGLC is indeed a Treasury Board and Finance branch. It's part of Treasury Board and Finance. So why would the minister whose job is to reduce redundancies go in and try to accomplish things for other ministries, Mr. Speaker? It doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense because it seems that this bill does not have the support, does not have the comprehension and the long-term thinking of this government. They haven't done their homework, right? Again and again we can see it's a pattern of behaviour with this government. It's a pattern of behaviour that this government does not want to actually go through and do the work beforehand, make sure their bills are up to snuff, make sure that the bills have been researched and thought out. It's a pattern of behaviour, and it's something that this government should be ashamed of. It's something that this government should be embarrassed of.

If I was Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and I was asked to bring forward a bill that was already being implemented in regulation, was not even covered under my ministry, and then my stated job was to reduce these types of redundancies, I know that would be embarrassing for me. I wouldn't dare speak for the minister, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps the minister will have his chance later to rise in this place and explain how this isn't a redundancy, how he isn't doing a redundant job, and how another ministry that perhaps already oversees this organization could not have brought this forward instead. Perhaps that minister will have the opportunity to explain and justify his \$10 million expenditure for his office later in this place. I look forward to that.

Certainly, as we move forward with this bill and as we debate this bill, we need to understand that it really is this dichotomy of agendas, right? It's really this juxtaposition of values, Mr. Speaker. The government says on the one hand that they want to support the enjoyment of public spaces. Well, the government says on the one hand that they want Albertans to go out and enjoy these public spaces and then closes those public spaces and then reduces accessibility for those public spaces and then takes away those parks, the ones that Albertans like the people who were on the grounds today, who were walking around and enjoying themselves.

I know they're in all corners of this province, right? We have public parks in all corners of this province, and when we look at that, we can say: well, is this bill actually accomplishing any of those things? This bill brings in, for example, clauses that streamline this process at the municipal level for some liquor licences – right? – so they wouldn't require as many votes in councils. Sure. That sounds fairly reasonable, Mr. Speaker, but

when the province decides to close so many of those parks and close so many of those private spaces and privatize so many of those private spaces, it means that those municipalities wouldn't even have the choice to make that. That's the real problem with this bill. The real problem with this bill is that all the things that it wants to do in terms of reducing the redundancies and increasing efficiencies, all those opportunities are already being removed because this government made the decision to close or privatize 164 parks, privatize ideologically 164 parks and close or partially close 20 additional parks. Those are the types of things that we're talking about.

Then there are going to be some things like the elimination of the literal prohibition of alcohol in Cardston that was passed in the 1950s. That was a choice that Cardston made. I know that we have two MLAs from that area here in the Chamber. Now, with this new legislation it's going to eliminate that prohibition and allow municipalities like Cardston to make those decisions at administrative levels, to not require the votes to make those decisions on who they want to provide permits and licences for. That's what this bill is actually talking about.

But on the other hand, all the types of spaces that were public spaces that this government operated, whether they were public parks, are now being closed – right? – or are now already closed, so that's the shocking thing. The shocking thing is that this government does not seem to understand how this is hypocritical. The government doesn't even stop to think about how the hypocrisy will be reflected on Albertans. We know thousands of Albertans were outraged and are outraged that they were losing access to so many of their public spaces, some of the most popular UNESCO world heritage sites right here in Alberta. Some UNESCO world heritage sites right here in Alberta, like Dinosaur provincial park, were partially closed by this government.

5:40

We talk about how Albertans want to enjoy that. I know that I myself have enjoyed that park, and I know that many Albertans want to go to that park and use the clauses that are in this bill and go and do things like perhaps have a beer while they're camping or have a glass of wine, whatever it is, Mr. Speaker. Instead, that park is now partially closed. There's less accessibility for Albertans, there are fewer services available for Albertans, and they're going to be able to enjoy it less. That's the dichotomy. That's the hypocrisy. That's the cognitive dissonance that we're moving forward with, right? It's surprising to us because Albertans have spoken pretty clearly about this, and Albertans have spoken pretty clearly that they wanted to go out and use these clauses, use this bill to enjoy their spaces.

I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that you've probably seen it in many public spaces, even before this bill was introduced and before this bill was proposed, that some Albertans would go out and do things like drink alcohol in public spaces, even at the time that it was prohibited. So we know there is an interest from the public in terms of this, right? We know that the public does indeed have an interest in some of this. You can't on the other hand, then – Albertans can't expect to say: well, we can go out and enjoy those public spaces; there are just going to be many fewer of them because they've all been sold off; 164 of them have been sold off. Twenty of them have been closed or partially closed, right? That's the really strange thing.

I mean, it is going to be, I think, interesting as we move forward with this debate. It's going to be interesting because we're going to hear from the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction again, I hope, at different stages of this bill, of course, on why he thinks that this is an effective use of his ministry, why it couldn't have been

under a different minister, perhaps Treasury Board and Finance, Mr. Speaker. It's going to be interesting to see how the minister justifies that this is actually in his mandate letter, right? This is in his stated goals. He wanted to reduce redundancy and reduce red tape.

It would seem that the \$10 million budget this minister has been afforded, the \$10 million that Albertans have entrusted this minister with, are simply there to say one thing and then do another. It's surprising. I think it's hypocritical. I think Albertans will see right through it. I think Albertans are seeing right through it. I mean, I know I've received thousands of letters, e-mails, phone calls, and correspondence to my office, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you have as well. I'm sure many of these offices here in the Official Opposition and certainly in the government as well have heard about this. I think it'd be important for us to have that context.

When we move forward with this legislation, I'm looking forward to members of the government caucus, if they'd like to speak to this bill, perhaps explaining why it's okay to take away the parks that we're talking about actually increasing enjoyment for, why it's okay to reduce the services in those parks that people want to enjoy more. Mr. Speaker, we're talking about things like allowing people to have the beers in the park – right? – while they're camping or whatever it was, and now in those same parks that we're talking about, there will no longer be a service campground. There will no longer be a service facility there. We're talking about this really hypocritical policy, in a sense, that it doesn't actually meet the stated goals, and I think that's something that this government needs to think very hard about and should be quite embarrassed about.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 2, being the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020. Now, this bill indeed does accomplish some good things: the ability for Albertans to enjoy liquor in parks, so allowing for liquor to be consumed in parks without food, in municipal urban centres, giving municipalities the right to determine which parks, if any, that would apply to. I can say that indeed that is something I have heard from Albertans about and that that is something they want to embrace.

Indeed, I remember having visited Montreal a few years back and seeing people out in the parks enjoying a glass of wine or a beer, and I heard from many Albertans that they would like to have the opportunity to do the same. In general, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the broad majority of Albertans are responsible enough to do so and that it's within the power of our law enforcement to deal with those who lack that responsibility. I think this is a good and positive change.

Indeed, I think of many festivals I've had the opportunity to enjoy here in the city of Edmonton. I think in particular of the Interstellar Rodeo festival, a fantastic music festival that, sadly, ended as of last year. In the years it existed I had the chance to attend it many times down in Hawrelak park here in Edmonton. One of the things people greatly enjoyed about that festival is that you could come there as a family, and indeed it did not require a beer garden. Folks were able to sit wherever they liked and enjoy the music and be able to enjoy a beverage responsibly. Indeed, I can't say that I ever saw anyone being irresponsible in their enjoyment of alcohol at that festival. So here is an opportunity, then, for Albertans to enjoy that opportunity in all of our parks across the province of Alberta.

Now, I know there have been concerns in the past, and indeed there were restrictions that were brought in around some long

weekend drinking in some of our park spaces. Indeed that did grow to be a concern and problematic for many people who wanted to simply enjoy a camping long weekend and were disturbed by folks who lacked the ability to be responsible in their alcohol consumption or considerate of others in their area. I know that is a change that the government lifted as of the May long weekend last year.

It will be interesting to see how that plays out. It was difficult to get a good sense of how that's going to play out. Last year it was sort of a fairly short announcement just before that long weekend, so we perhaps didn't see the full effects of that, and of course this year with the COVID-19 pandemic there really was not much in the way of camping happening in our public parks. So we will see the impacts of that further down the road.

In general what I would say is that I think this is a prudent move. We've seen this done in other jurisdictions, we've seen that it has been successful, and I think that we as Albertans can find a way to implement this in a successful way as well.

Now, the bill also proposes to streamline the processes at the municipal level for liquor licence approval, so not requiring votes, putting it at the discretion of the municipality. Interesting. Eliminating a bit of Alberta history, I guess, the literal prohibition of booze in Cardston that was passed back in the 1950s. It's interesting to learn some of this history, Mr. Speaker, if I may digress for a moment.

Back when I was working on the Edmonton live music initiative, I had the chance to speak with the late Senator Tommy Banks, and he had some interesting stories to tell about the early days of working as a musician in Edmonton and the days back when there were quite some strict restrictions on alcohol consumption in bars and restaurants here in the city of Edmonton. They were restricted to only beer. You weren't supposed to have hard liquor, but a lot of places you went to had a handy little box just under the table, kind of like what we've got here for our bills and that sort of thing, where one could keep one's bottle of hard liquor just out of sight, of course, finding ways, creative ways, to circumvent those laws.

I think it's time to perhaps remove some anachronistic legislation like this for the people of Cardston, of course recognizing that the municipality of Cardston will now have the choice – it won't be by act of law, but they can choose by their municipal law – whether they wish to follow that, and hopefully the good folks of Cardston will have the opportunity to enjoy a beverage of their choice as well.

There are some changes to licence conditions that will allow the AGLC to put a condition on any new long-term licence before any infractions occur. That strikes me as generally probably a reasonable provision. An example would be, I guess, if you have a bar open in an area that's known for, say, high crime activity or other problems, that sort of thing. Then there may be a requirement that they have a coat or bag check or something else to sort of deal with potential problems in that area. I think in general the AGLC has a fairly good understanding. I mean, I suppose some might raise concerns about putting that power in their hands, but I understand that there would be – to my understanding, there are appeal processes and other things that would be in place to allow that to be contested. In general I don't take issue with that change.

And then, lastly, just recognizing that by policy AGLC has allowed liquor to be raffled. Indeed, I think I've attended many a fundraising event where that, in fact, was the case, and that tends to be a fairly good way to raise a few dollars for a good cause. Now what we see is that that will be codified in legislation.

In general not a whole lot to take issue with in terms of what this bill is actually seeking to accomplish. I recognize that this was part of the UCP platform, at least the section about giving municipalities more flexibility to permit responsible adults to drink alcohol in

parks or at street festivals or in other areas. Indeed it was part of a largely unsuccessful, I would say, line of attack that the government liked to use, talking about the war on fun. Certainly, I would say that between our leader and theirs most Albertans have generally seen which tends to be the more visibly fun-loving. Anyone who's seen the Leader of the Official Opposition at a pride parade would certainly not question that, nor perhaps the question of who between the two would have the better dancing abilities.

5:50

That said, this was part of the government's plan to end the war on fun. That's been a talking point they've dropped, but, still, it's a reasonable thing to bring forward. It's a reasonable change. It was part of their platform. We see that moving forward today.

However, what I would say is that, as my colleague from Edmonton-South noted, in general I'm not aware that it required legislation to enact any of these pieces. To the best of my understanding – and perhaps the minister could correct me if I'm wrong. To the best of my knowledge this all could have been accomplished through regulation. For some reason the government felt it was necessary to create legislation and bring it into the House and have it debated here in front of us, that it was important that this be scrutinized by all 87 MLAs to ensure that indeed the government was getting it right and to ensure that there were no issues, that there was nothing that the government had missed, that we would have the opportunity to go out and consult with stakeholders and get folks' opinions and bring them back to this House. That is the reason you bring in legislation, Mr. Speaker. And the government – again, I'm open to correction if I'm wrong – instead of simply enacting this by regulation, felt that there was the need to bring it into this House for debate and for scrutiny in front of the people of Alberta.

Now, indeed this is a bill that, as my colleague for Edmonton-South noted, deals with our public parks. It's an interesting contrast, Mr. Speaker, to what this government considers to be important to receive scrutiny and consultation in the full view of the people of Alberta and indeed for proper accountability and what they do not. These four pieces of fairly innocuous changes, which, again to the best of my understanding, could have been accomplished by regulation, are brought in for debate in this House, but some significant changes to our parks system have received absolutely no scrutiny at all and indeed received so little if any consultation and were simply enacted by the minister and now are regularly denied

because he recognizes just how abhorrent those changes are and how unwanted they are by Albertans.

We are here today debating this bill on these four pieces, making some changes to various aspects of liquor licensing and liquor use and indeed involving the parks system, but we do not have the opportunity in this House to actually have a robust debate that I think many Albertans would like to see this government defend, that they would very much like to hear from this government, that being the cuts that they're making, the full or partial closure of 20 parks, barring the public from 11 of those parks, nine being left accessible but without any services, and another 164 to be handed over to third parties to manage.

That is certainly a concern of mine, Mr. Speaker, what this government considers to be worthy of debate and consultation and scrutiny by Albertans and what they do not. I look forward to further opportunities to debate that in this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, we are on the main bill. Is there anyone wishing to add to the debate this evening?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to close the debate. He would have up to five minutes to do so, should he choose to do so. And by five minutes I mean 15.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I would close debate on this bill in second reading. Just really quickly, though, to answer the member's questions, this does actually take legislation. We would've done it in changing regulations had we been able to, but section 54 needed to be changed, and that's the reason why we had to bring this bill forward. I wanted to make sure that he got an answer to that question because I felt that he was being reasonable in his questioning and debate here today.

With that, I close debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the robust debate that we've had this afternoon. Since the clock is nearing 6 o'clock, I move that we adjourn the Legislature until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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