



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 3, 2020

Day 25

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

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

Second Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 3, 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 power and 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. Amen.

Please be seated.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was in Gatineau one year ago today to witness the ceremony for the release of the final report on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. For the family members, the loved ones, and survivors who participated, the inquiry was a two-year journey of bravery and perseverance as they shared their personal experiences of daughters who have been missing for decades, mothers whose bodies were found in shallow graves, sisters who went away to school and never made their way home. They told their stories with broken hearts and great courage and clear purpose. Family members and loved ones spoke to the inquiry about their need for answers, justice, understanding, and action.

Mr. Speaker, indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than any other women in Canada. In 2017 the homicide rate of indigenous females was six times higher than that of nonindigenous females. We have to pay heed to the words and the harsh realities of those who survive. Their thoughtful words must compel all Canadians, governments, police services, the justice system, and communities to take action that puts an end to this national tragedy.

When I was in Gatineau, I connected with a mother who had lost her loved one, and I committed that this government would take action. I made that same commitment to Albertans when I marched on Stephen Avenue mall with hundreds of others at the Sisters in Spirit gathering last fall. I reaffirmed this when I accepted a red dress from the Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society.

We kept our promise to survivors of violence and the memories of those who are gone by announcing the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Members come from different backgrounds and experiences, but they share in common an unbendable resolve to end violence against indigenous women and girls. As a group they will help to identify actions that Alberta can address and recommend ways to bring together indigenous communities, governments, and the private sector to eliminate violence against indigenous women and girls.

Mr. Speaker, some may wonder why this is a priority while the province deals with a pandemic and the relaunching of an economy that has been deeply affected by global affairs. The actions we take now are going to help curb the violence. We passed Alberta's

version of Clare's law so that people at risk can learn about an intimate partner's history of domestic violence. We recently announced a human trafficking task force to prevent human trafficking and protect and empower survivors, and we continue to work with the government antiracism committee because racism can lead to violence.

By tackling these issues, Mr. Speaker, we have set the groundwork for strong solutions that increase safety for indigenous women and girls. We stand beside loved ones and family members of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and we are listening and taking action. I urge all people in Alberta to read the report, to think, and act upon the calls.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One year ago the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls delivered its final report. It's a powerful testament to the courage and strength of indigenous women and families and the failures of governments past and present. On behalf of our caucus I want to honour those who shared their deeply traumatic experiences with the commission. A great responsibility now rests on legislators, officials, and indeed all Canadians, a responsibility to confront these hard truths and to act on them.

We are glad that a working group with indigenous leaders was formed to develop Alberta-specific actions to reduce violence against indigenous women and girls, even if it did take the government 10 months to do so. We look forward to seeing action. While we wait, it is very troubling to see this government make deep and reckless cuts to programs that used to exist for indigenous people in Alberta. I hope that this government understands that loan guarantees for economic development projects cannot replace action to address systemic racism in our justice system, our health care system, our education system, our child protection system, many other government agencies, and indeed our broader society.

We also cannot forget that words have power as well. The UCP continues to avoid calling the murder of thousands of indigenous women and girls in Canada what it is, a genocide. Last year Chief Commissioner Marion Buller told us we had the opportunity to rebuild Canada itself in a real partnership with indigenous peoples. I'll quote from her preface to the report.

Skeptics will be fearful and will complain that the financial cost of rebuilding is too great, that enough has been done, that enough money has been spent. To them I say, we as a nation cannot afford not to rebuild. Otherwise, we all knowingly enable the continuation of genocide in our own country.

I invite the government to reflect on these words.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Alberta Medical Association and Rural Physicians

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the members opposite for finally recognizing the importance of rural Alberta and especially rural physicians. I'd also like to point out the AMA's sudden interest in the plight of our rural communities and their physician recruitment and retention. I understand they even acclaimed a rural physician as president. In the five years I've been an MLA, doctor recruitment and retention in rural Alberta has been a huge issue. In fact, it has been an issue for the past three decades at least. Where have the AMA and the NDP been all this time?

Interestingly enough, I have recently discovered that while the NDP were running things, a deal was made between them and the AMA in 2017-2018. While the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was Health minister, negotiations took place between the NDP government and the AMA. Those negotiations resulted in an amendment to the legislation making the AMA the exclusive representative in government consultation with regard to physician compensation and benefits. In exchange for this exclusive agreement the AMA agreed to terminate the physician retention benefit from 2018 onward, a move that directly affected rural physicians at a time when we were already struggling to attract and retain. Millions of dollars out of their pockets. I quote from the minister of the day in a press release. "This legislation was a commitment . . . made as part of the recent agreement with doctors, and we've made good on that promise."

Rural doctors in communities have lost their ability to make beneficial agreements directly with their government outside of the AMA that would help in doctor recruitment and retention. Rural Albertans: sold out by the NDP and AMA. There is a reason we have separate urban and rural municipality associations in this province. Perhaps it's time to address this with physicians as well. Perhaps it is time that we had a collective body to truly represent rural physicians. Imagine this. Rural doctors representing rural doctors and rural communities and the unique circumstances they face day to day.

Rural Alberta is the economic engine of this province and this country. Our residents deserve access to good-quality, timely health care without the constant worry of keeping the physicians they have and attracting new ones when needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All four candidates for the federal Conservative leadership say that it's wrong for their party to take federal wage subsidies meant for struggling businesses and nonprofits. "We should not be bailed out by taxpayer money with millions unemployed and small businesses struggling to stay afloat," says Peter MacKay. "I believe our standard should not simply be whether or not we are better than the Liberals," says Leslyn Lewis. "Political parties shouldn't be receiving the wage subsidy," says Derek Sloan. Erin O'Toole says: "Canadians have sacrificed enough. They shouldn't have to pay for wage subsidies for political parties."

But candidates are not leaders, and for now the blame lands on Andrew Scheer. That's a good fit for a man who was forced to resign for his handling of his party's money. Of course, he didn't do it alone. Scheer's misuse of party money was cosigned by his executive director, Dustin van Vugt, and van Vugt recently got a new job – wait for it – managing the UCP's money. You can't make this stuff up. The guy who resigned from the federal Conservative Party for misuse of funds lands a job in charge of the books for the UCP, and he immediately exploits a loophole to grab taxpayers' money meant for food banks and homeless shelters. The Premier claims the UCP needed a Trudeau bailout because they stopped fund raising during the COVID-19 pandemic. That's simply not true. I'll table the fundraising e-mails that the UCP has sent out during the pandemic, including the most recent, on the Premier's birthday.

1:40

So let's be clear. The so-called Conservatives over there are double-dipping. They're still asking their donors for money while

also forcing Canadian taxpayers to sweeten the pot at the same time. O'Toole says that if he wins, he will pay back all the money that federal Conservatives are pilfering from Canadian taxpayers. Will it take a change in leadership before the UCP returns to its principles and gives the money back? The Premier's decision was wrong, and every one of these members knows it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

HALO Medical Rescue Helicopter Funding

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. HALO air rescue service in southern Alberta is a critical service. I have received many calls and e-mails to my office from scared and concerned residents in Cypress-Medicine Hat regarding the possibility of actually losing HALO. Tax dollars are used to fund these critical services through STARS in northern and central Alberta, and it is my belief that such a critical service should also be funded appropriately in southern Alberta. While Alberta Health Services has assured us that no gaps in air rescue will be felt, many of us are concerned about fewer available emergency rescue helicopters, leaving all Albertans vulnerable.

Operating out of Medicine Hat, HALO is well-positioned to provide its services to our region. There are many stories and testimonials from those who have benefited from their timely response. Paul Schaufele was on his way out to a water well service job when a tire blew on his service truck, and it rolled. Thanks to the services of HALO rescue arrived, and once the emergency crews were able to safely free him, he was officially transported to hospital in only 14 minutes. For him to arrive in only 14 minutes, compared to much longer by ground ambulance, is absolutely incredible.

Edwin Camps was working on his potato farm when a pin from his vehicle shot out through a windshield and struck him in the jaw and neck. HALO was there to retrieve him from the field and save his life. If not for their fast response in transportation, his experience would likely have been fatal.

HALO is efficient with their dollars and needs support. Donors in our area are rallying around this life-saving service. However, these donors are also taxpayers, and taxpayers' funds are used to support other critical air ambulance services in other parts of Alberta. It is my hope that an agreement can be reached so we can support HALO going forward. They're a life-saving asset in our area, Mr. Speaker, and Alberta families cannot afford to lose them.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has delivered a blow to both students and staff in Alberta's colleges and universities. Already dealing with rising tuition costs thanks to this UCP government, they are now having to deal with the loss of summer income and a high degree of uncertainty in general. The postsecondary sector has seen particularly hard hits due to associated costs with moving to teaching online, all of this compounded by deep cuts to operating grants by this UCP government.

So today, Mr. Speaker, I thought we could maybe take a look at what other provinces are doing and perhaps learn something from them. Recognizing that students need emergency financial assistance, the British Columbia government gave \$3.5 million for emergency student assistance. In Saskatchewan the government made \$1.5 million available for emergency bursaries to both domestic and international students. In Manitoba the government reversed its planned cuts to the sector and is investing more than \$25 million

more to their colleges and universities. Ontario has completely shelved its plan for a performance-based funding model so that colleges and universities can focus on addressing the biggest shock to their sector in living memory.

But here in Alberta all the government has done so far is to suspend student loan payments for six months and defer the disastrous performance-based funding model. Suspending performance-based funding is a win for everyone who fought so hard against this destructive policy, and I thank them for that, although with this UCP government it's important to always be on your guard.

Ezra

Mr. Loewen: Red Shirt Day is a day to show support for those with disabilities. I'd like to mention a few people who have made a difference in my life: Kaythen, who eagerly helps in my Fairview office; my wife's incredibly strong cousin Joanne, living in Manoir du lac; and my friend Hayden: rest in peace.

But today I want to direct most of my comments to my grandson Ezra. When you meet Ezra, you would never know what he has gone through. Ezra was born as a twin to his big brother Silas. Things were pretty rough right from the start. As a monochorionic-diamniotic twin with twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, he was born at 28 weeks, at a little over two pounds. He spent his first five months in the NICU undergoing dozens of surgeries and surgical procedures. We never heard him cry until Mother's Day, at five months after he was born. He was on oxygen support for his first year. He was tube fed exclusively for almost two years, and at four years the feeding tube was removed. In his most recent surgery doctors took tissue from his rib cage and grafted it to the front and back of his trachea to enlarge and strengthen it so that he could breathe and eat easier. That was a tough one for all of us as he had to be sedated for 10 days for healing, and the week of sedative withdrawal was painful to watch. We could tell that Ezra was behind his twin brother Silas, but the reality really hits when you hear the specialists' assessment as cerebral palsy, which has varying degrees of severity.

I learned many things from my experiences with Ezzy. One was that even though it would have been natural to coddle him, his parents chose to challenge him. Some may consider it tough love, but really it is true love, similar to how a butterfly needs to struggle out of its cocoon to survive. It's hard to watch Ezzy crawling on concrete or other hard surfaces to this day. My knees ache just watching him. Ezzy started to take his first steps at five years old, and now at six and a half he's walking better and better every day.

Another thing I learned is how tough Ezzy is. He has fought through multiple surgeries, multiple and months of intubations, years of tube feeding, crawling, physiotherapy, and speech issues. He meets every challenge with determination and a smile that melts your heart, and he has quite the sense of humour, too.

In closing, please remember those who live with disabilities not just on Red Shirt Day but every day. You see their current struggles, but they have extensive struggles in their past and future. And, Ezzy, you're my hero, big man.

Filipino Community

Ms Hoffman: [Remarks in Filipino] I'm proud to stand and recognize June as Philippine Heritage Month in Alberta. I'm very proud that our NDP government made this an annual occurrence, and on a personal note it was a great honour to attend the inaugural government of Alberta Filipino leadership summit, and it was a great pleasure, on my personal money and my personal time, to visit the Philippines.

Alberta is home to more than 175,000 Filipino Albertans, and it is the second-largest Filipino community here in Canada. Filipino Albertans have always made tremendous contributions to our society through their faith, civic engagement, rich cultural values, and love of family. I know many Albertans will be celebrating Filipino Independence Day on June 12, and this year I'm reflecting on how many front-line essential workers in Alberta have Filipino ancestry: many health care workers, meat-packing workers, grocery workers, supply-chain workers, education workers, just to name a few. They have been essential service providers for us in Alberta during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many are Filipino.

Philippine Heritage Month will be a good time for this government to reflect on where it has failed to protect these workers and honour the risks that they take for all of us. I am proud to have joined Filipino community leaders to press the government to remove the barriers for health care that many precarious workers, temporary foreign workers, and their family members face. I know Alberta's Filipino community embraces hard work, family, and fun as well as values of empathy and solidarity. With these values in mind, we need to keep them dear more than ever. So let us unite, Mr. Speaker. [Remarks in Filipino]

Accessibility and Inclusion

Mr. Rowsell: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and recognize Red Shirt Day and National AccessAbility Week, which takes place from May 31 to June 6 this year. Established in 2017, National AccessAbility Week gives us an opportunity to celebrate, promote, and showcase progress towards diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Today is Red Shirt Day, and it is organized by Easter Seals Canada. Easter Seals Canada provides direct-to-client programs and services in support of Canadians who are living with disabilities or who have diverse abilities. Today I believe in wearing red in order to express my commitment to help create a fully accessible and inclusive society.

As a member of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I am proud to be a part of this government which continues to follow through on our platform commitments to Albertans with mobility and other challenges. We have provided advice to government regarding inclusive employment, the persons with developmental disabilities program, and the impacts of COVID-19 on the disability community. Our government is doing everything we can to build a more inclusive society that honours and values the contributions of people of all abilities in all aspects of life here in our province and across Canada. For example, our government is providing \$3.5 million annually, an increase of \$800,000 over the previous government, to the residential access modification program, or RAMP, which helps individuals with mobility challenges to make the modifications necessary to live comfortably in their homes and participate more fully in their communities.

Even though this year we have to celebrate differently due to COVID-19, we can still show, through days like today, how much a more accessible Canada means to us.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Economic Relaunch Strategy and Small Business

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said that Alberta may speed up phase 2 of its economic

relaunch plan. Good news. The problem is that there are still phase 1 businesses that can't afford to reopen. Now, the Premier is shamelessly pocketing taxpayer dollars for his own party, but he has no problem telling Albertans who spend their lives building their businesses: good luck; you're mostly on your own. He won't help with PPE, he won't help with retrofits, and he won't ban commercial evictions while the rent subsidy program remains broken. Why is the Premier abandoning Alberta's entrepreneurs when they need him the most?

Mr. Kenney: Well, we're doing no such thing, Mr. Speaker. Prominent NDP spokesman Gil McGowan has called for all businesses to be shut down for another month. We won't listen to that NDP spokesman nor, by the way, to his bigotry against people of faith. We are in a position, hopefully, to be able to move forward more quickly with the phase 2 relaunch because of the strong performance of Albertans in combating the COVID pandemic, and we will be announcing additional measures to assist small and medium-sized businesses that have been affected by public health measures over the recent weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Well, at least the commercial eviction ban is a success. We've been asking for it since March, so I think it's really good news; it's a common-sense move, really, that just gives a little bit more breathing space: that's the CFIB. Taking evictions off the table, well, that can bring the two groups together and get some good relief going to small business: that's the Chamber of Commerce. Whoops. My mistake, though. Those are reactions from B.C., where the government has taken leadership. To the Premier: what are you waiting for?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows, the government of Alberta committed to a full, maximum partnership with the government of Canada on a commercial tenant rent relief measure. We've committed \$67 million. We regret to see that not all landlords are using that, so we will be coming forward with an announcement shortly that demonstrates greater protection for those tenants of landlords who refuse to participate in that rent subsidy program.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the thing. Commercial rent was due two days ago, and we've been calling for extra help and the eviction ban for weeks. Small-business owners who could not pay are now worried that they'll be evicted. We're calling for the ban, the CFIB is calling for the ban, the Alberta Chambers are calling for the ban, Restaurants Canada and the Retail Council of Canada are all calling for the ban. We've been asking questions over and over, and we're tired of hearing the delays. To the Premier: will you take action today and finally commit to and announce implementing a ban on commercial eviction?

Mr. Kenney: Well, in fact, Alberta does not have a commercial tenants act, unlike other provinces, and that was true, of course, under the NDP, so it's not possible to "take action today." The government will be moving forward with additional measures to protect commercial tenants, but, Mr. Speaker, we should all recognize that it makes no sense for commercial landlords to be evicting tenants at this time to open up space that cannot be occupied, given the crisis in our economy. So we once again plead with commercial landlords to exercise common sense and to, wherever possible, participate in the rent subsidy program that will be supported by at least \$67 million by the government of Alberta.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To be honest, last week we offered this government to move very quickly on whatever legislation was required to put a ban in place.

Victims of Crime Fund

Ms Notley: The victims of crime fund was set up 30 years ago to support people in the worst times of their lives. It covers counselling, income replacement, child support, funeral costs, and more. These are not tax dollars, Mr. Speaker; this money is for victims. Instead, however, this government plans on raiding the fund, using Bill 16, because it refuses to properly fund law enforcement and the criminal justice system. To the Premier. For some families this is the only support they will see after being victimized. Why are you taking the funding away from them?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this is not an either/or situation. This is about more. We're increasing the victims of crime fund by 50 per cent, 20 million additional dollars to go into public safety. This is what we heard from Albertans when we were out there talking to them. They're living in fear in the rural communities. They want action to make sure that their cases are prosecuted, that police will be there to answer the call. Where were the NDP for four years when rural Albertans were crying out for help? Those people have been victimized. They're living in fear. The NDP should be supporting this initiative.

Ms Notley: Well, where we were, Mr. Speaker, was funding rural police rather than taking the money out of rural policing.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier, or the minister now, apparently, says that he has to take money from victims in order to pay for police while he takes tax dollars for his political party. Seriously. The president of the Alberta victim service association says: the Justice minister won't even sit down to answer questions or hear ideas; their minds are made up. No one is arguing that we don't need more police or prosecutors, but it is cruel that, of all people, it's victims that have to pay for them. To the Premier: why are you setting this up?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we've consulted with victims' groups. This is why we set it up with two MLAs, the MLA for Airdrie-East and the MLA for Grande-Prairie, to continue that effort to improve the services provided through the victims of crime fund.

Again, where were the NDP for four years? They could have enhanced restitution powers. They sat on their hands and did nothing. They could have enhanced the ability to have community impact statements in our courts. For four years: nothing. They could have proclaimed scrap metal dealer legislation that was sitting there, on the books. For four years: no action for victims.

Ms Notley: Well, where we were, Mr. Speaker, was not raiding the victims of crime fund in order to pay for policing.

Now, Jan Reimer, with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, says: more should be done for children witnessing domestic violence; instead, they actually have to jump through more hoops, not less. Areni Kelleppan, executive director of the Stop Abuse in Families Society, said that they were recently denied funding to help victims of elder abuse. Premier, why won't you properly fund these organizations instead of just taking money away from them to pay for policing?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we, again, look forward to consulting with groups from across Alberta on how we can improve the victims of crime fund. That's why we set up our working group here, led by two of our MLAs. That's what we're going to do. We're going to make sure that we improve this and roll out a new program in 2021 regarding that.

Mr. Speaker, again, here we have the NDP deflecting from their record on crime, NDP justice in rural communities, with people living in fear when somebody drives a vehicle down their dirt road. Shame on them. They weren't there for victims for four years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has a question to ask.

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One year ago the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls delivered its final report. This report includes 231 calls for justice, some of which are directed specifically at provincial governments and provincial agencies. Why did the Premier wait 10 months before establishing a working group to respond to the report, and what specific actions, if any, has he taken to answer these calls for justice? Do you have any specific actions, Mr. Premier, not loan guarantees?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few initiatives that we've already taken up in response to the calls for justice include human trafficking and preventing domestic violence. Our government recently announced the human trafficking task force. Last fall our government passed Bill 17, the Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act, so there can be more protections for those at risk of domestic violence. Last October I had the privilege of attending the Sisters in Spirit Day and accepting a red dress, if you remember, from the Awo Taan society, which I then tabled in this House. It demonstrated the commitment to work alongside indigenous communities and all Albertans to combat violence against indigenous women.

Mr. Feehan: Your dress is pretty but not enough.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Feehan: Examples of calls to action that the Premier could act on immediately include establishing an indigenous civilian police oversight body, training of Crown attorneys and court staff in indigenous history, and funding expanded access to legal aid to ensure that indigenous women and girls have meaningful participation in the justice system. This government seems to be able to move swiftly to create a new parole board and a new provincial firearms official. Why are none of these calls to justice priorities for this Premier? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister for the status of women has risen.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This kind of rhetoric, to be able to use that in this House with such disrespect, on a day where this member decides to politicize one of the most important documents that any of us have had the privilege to receive in this House to find out how to end domestic violence against a group of women who are unbelievably vulnerable in this particular situation: I demand at this point in time, in question period, that this

member stand up, apologize to every single indigenous woman in this country right now. [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Feehan: When will the UCP learn that murder is political? Last year commissioner Marion Buller wrote: "In this report, we use hard words to address hard truths like genocide, colonization, murder and rape. To deny these hard words is to deny the truths of the families and survivors, front-line workers, and grassroots organizers." I asked the minister in October if he supported the use of the word "genocide," and he flinched from this question. Premier, you've had a year to think about hard truths. Was the murder of thousands of indigenous women and girls in Canada a genocide? Yes or no?

Mr. Wilson: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. This is just incomprehensible. This government is deeply committed to addressing the violence against indigenous women and girls and taking real, concrete action to implement the calls to justice that can help indigenous women in this province. Instead of focusing on symbolic gestures and abstract definitions, we want to take real, practical steps in making the province a safer and better place to live for those in the indigenous community.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order was noted at 2 o'clock today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a question.

Provincial Parks

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has moved swiftly to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a cover to sell hundreds of parks that belong to Albertans out from underneath them. Lethbridge teacher Wendy Urquhart said today, quote: once this protected land, which has always been available for us to enjoy, is out of the province's hands, Albertans will have no say in the matter. And Wendy hasn't had any say to date because the Premier refuses to consult on this ill-conceived plan. To the Premier: why won't you listen to tens of thousands of Albertans who know that selling parks is a bad idea?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been clear that that's completely false. The Alberta government is not selling parks. We did listen to Albertans, though, in the last election, who voted for this party to be Alberta's government in overwhelming numbers, in record numbers, and one of the things they voted for was in our platform, a restructuring process for parks to make sure we go forward in positive ways, again, that do not involve selling parks. What they do involve is stopping practices, that were in place underneath the NDP, of using helicopters to deliver firewood or having staff drive six-hour round trips to camping facilities that were not being used. And I'll have more to say about that in a few seconds.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This provincial government has claimed that they need to sell our parks to save money. They claim that there's not a dollar to spare to save Riverlot 56 in St. Albert or to prevent the partial closure of Bow Valley provincial park, west of Calgary. I don't believe this because while the UCP claims that the cupboards are bare, they're reaching in to snag some federal money to pay the debts of the United Conservative

Party. To the Premier: are you really going to put your future political aspirations over Alberta's cherished parks?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, to be clear, no provincial parks are for sale at all. That is categorically false. It's unfortunate to see the NDP continuing to misrepresent facts inside this Assembly. The reality is that we do have some facilities that are transferring from the parks act to the Public Lands Act. They remain protected. The Public Lands Act protects most of the land inside this province, and Albertans will continue to have access to those recreation facilities. But the practices that the NDP had of using helicopters to deliver firewood or having staff drive long distances from one end of the department to be able to keep care of those facilities will stop.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, if this building weren't closed to the public, the galleries would be packed today with Albertans wanting to save our parks. This government has refused to consult, and they've moved to sell these parks while Albertans have been stuck indoors during a pandemic. Still, our caucus has talked to Albertans. We've held virtual town halls, and we've talked to many stakeholders. To the Premier: could you at least pretend to care about these parks? If I personally arranged some virtual town halls for him, would he grow a backbone and bother to show up?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm confused. The NDP seems very excited about selling parks, but I want to be clear that the Alberta government is not selling parks. The NDP can continue to have town halls talking about selling parks, but let me assure you and assure Albertans through you that Alberta's government will not be selling parks. But we will be stopping the abuse of taxpayer dollars that we saw underneath the NDP government and continue to provide recreation facilities across this province in an effective way while protecting landscapes. Again – I want to be clear – we are not selling parks.

Capital Projects

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, too many Albertans are unemployed. This has been the case for some time, but the problem has been and will continue to be exacerbated in the coming months with the far-reaching impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. We know that investment by the private sector is the only long-term path to economic growth; however, in the short term this government has continued to commit to infrastructure spending to stimulate the economy. Can the Minister of Infrastructure please share with Albertans what projects are planned or under way at this time?

Mr. Panda: I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for the first sensible question of the day. I'm pleased to report that in addition to the \$6.9 billion in capital investments approved by this House, we are accelerating an additional \$1 billion for capital maintenance and renewal projects which are shovel-ready. On top of that, I'm pushing hard to get federal infrastructure ICIP funds totalling another billion dollars. These projects will create much-needed local jobs across the province and position us well for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a most sensible way, given that Alberta has a number of interprovincial free trade agreements, including the New West Partnership, by which we must adhere and given that Alberta will likely see higher unemployment than places like Saskatchewan and British Columbia because of

plunging oil prices, what is the Minister of Infrastructure doing to ensure that Albertans are the first employed by these infrastructure projects?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that Alberta contractors compete regularly with companies from across the globe in compliance with various trade agreements and consistently win 90 per cent of the contracts awarded by my ministry. There are also lots of smaller consulting projects, like construction and consulting contracts below \$100,000, that are not subject to the same free trade agreements. We'll be looking to expeditiously award those contracts to local Alberta companies across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his encouraging answer. Given that the construction industry faces significant challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including difficulties procuring materials and challenges with work-site protocols and shutdown, and given that many of the agreements between contractors and the government never anticipated the COVID-related challenges, can the minister please inform the Assembly what he is doing to ensure that contractors have the certainty they need to continue building vital infrastructure for the province?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that construction companies face a set of unique challenges these days. We'll continue to deal with each of these circumstances on a case-by-case basis, and we will always be fair in our dealings with our industry partners if they require additional time or money. At the same time, while contractors have to defend their interests, Albertans expect me to spend taxpayers' money prudently, so we'll be fair, but we'll not play fast and loose with taxpayers' money.

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

Pension Fund Administration

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are still extremely concerned about this government's intentions when it comes to their pensions. It was a deeply regrettable decision by this government to seize control of public-sector pensions without even the slightest consultation with the people who built and contributed to those pension funds. Thousands of Albertans have written to our caucus and to me urging this government to reverse this attack on these pensions. Will the Minister of Finance listen to these Albertans and commit to restoring the rights he removed when he hijacked public-sector pensions?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, ultimately, our goal is to ensure that we have the most sustainable pension system in the province that the province could possibly have. That's why we made a number of changes last year to really strengthen pensions. That included strengthening AIMCo's ability to manage pensions and investments well. Ultimately, we know and research shows that expanding the quantum of assets managed results in lower costs.

2:10

Ms Gray: Given that the rushed Bill 22 forces Alberta teachers to use AIMCo as their investment manager and given that this Finance minister failed to provide careful, detailed, and risk-adjusted calculations of returns to justify that decision – it's fortunate that that analysis has now been done, and it shows that over the past seven years the teachers' pension fund would be worth \$1.3 billion

less if managed by AIMCo – and given that data shows that ATRF outperformed AIMCo each and every year from 2013 to 2019, does the Finance minister agree that it's now clear that forcing this move will cost taxpayers?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The information presented by the member opposite: we certainly wouldn't agree with that information. AIMCo has an excellent track record of providing excellent returns for its asset owners. Over the last number of years AIMCo has beat the benchmark 8 out of 10 years. We're confident that AIMCo will deliver well for Alberta teachers in the future.

Ms Gray: Given that they wouldn't have in the past and given that AIMCo has just made international news with its shocking losses and given that this Premier is threatening to withdraw Alberta from the Canada pension plan and given that the CPP he proposes to forcibly take Alberta out of has enjoyed record high returns this year while AIMCo, which he proposes to hand Albertan pensions to, has suffered record high, multibillion-dollar losses and serious criticism from pension experts, why is this Finance minister willing to jeopardize the retirements of Albertans when they are so clearly opposed? Will he finally listen to Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, AIMCo has an excellent track record over the years of delivering excellent returns for the owners of the assets that they manage. Again, we've made changes to strengthen pensions over the last year, including ensuring that AIMCo has a large asset base to manage, which will ultimately reduce the cost to manage those assets. That will result in improved net returns over time for all the pensions and the owners of the assets. We're confident that changes will result in positive outcomes for pensions.

Arts Funding

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, the UCP bent over backwards and exploited every loophole to make sure that their debt-ridden party got the bailout it needed to stay afloat, but the arts sector and artists have been left hanging. Artists were blindsided and disheartened when it was learned that this government was shelving grant applications. Renowned indigenous artist Adrian Stimson said that the elimination of these grants could mean the difference between an artist having a future and no future at all. Will the minister of culture provide a fraction of the support that she expects taxpayers to give to subsidize the UCP to our amazing and talented artists?

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, as always, such a pleasure to stand. Let me clarify again because, unfortunately, this member continues to mislead the public, and the information that has been put before her on multiple occasions, as she has access to my chief of staff on a regular basis – there has been no elimination. In fact, they've just been put on hold for a little bit because some of the programs are not able to run right now. I'm sorry to say that this member has a problem that the monies are going towards and dedicated to vulnerable populations during COVID.

The Speaker: I might just provide a little bit of caution to the hon. minister that you wouldn't want to imply that a member is misleading the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Stimson, a Governor General's award winning indigenous artist from Siksika, told the CBC about the devastating impact these cuts would have on emerging artists and given that he also said that attempts to defend this decision by claiming projects were unviable were, quote, a poor excuse, and given that no consultation was done before this change was announced by the government, why didn't the minister consult with the community before these changes, that will hurt the community? Will she apologize for the mistrust and fear that she and she alone has created in this community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. First of all, we have consulted widely.

I find it rich. You know, the member brings up indigenous art. I find that rich considering that just five seconds ago a member of her caucus literally took a priceless piece of indigenous art, that celebrates the loss of hundreds and hundreds of indigenous women in this country, and literally said, "[The] dress is pretty," painstakingly made, bead by bead, stitch by stitch, to honour a day like today.

Ms Goehring: Given that the UCP thought the idea that an artist being included on the economic recovery council was laughable and given that this attack, which the minister stood beside, ignores the fact that the arts generate over \$5 billion into our economy and given that Stimson said that many artists were considering leaving the province as a result of this heartless decision, will the minister apologize for the odious comments of her Premier and immediately commit to appointing a member of the arts community to the economic recovery council? Why should her fundraising get a bailout while indigenous arts get nothing?

Mrs. Aheer: Odious comments. Let me think. Gil McGowan had some pretty odious comments, and I have yet to see her denounce that, nor denounce to her own member that literally took one of the most beautiful pieces of art that we have on display at the Federal Building and said that the dress is pretty.

On top of that, we've done multiple consultations. These are temporary changes. We will have ample opportunity to hopefully work with this community to ramp up – and to also clarify, Peter Kiss, who is on the board, is also a member of the AFA. They believe that it's not meaningful to have somebody who understands business and art together on that council. I disagree.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Faith-based and Home Education

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a rich history of fighting for choice in education. In fact, protecting Catholic education rights was one of the articles hard fought for when Alberta joined Confederation. This is why I was profoundly disappointed when NDP affiliate Gil McGowan attacked faith-based education. Faith-based education is an important part of the cultural fabric of this province. Can the Minister of Education let us know what is being done to make sure that faith-based parents have someone who has their back in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Former NDP candidate and star appointee of the former NDP government Gil

McGowan's outrageous comments clearly outline why Bill 15 is necessary. Alberta has a long and successful history of school choice. It sets our education system apart from the rest of Canada. Albertans elected us to protect choice and to affirm that parents, not politicians, have the right to choose their child's education. It's been days since this outrageous comment was made. Will the members opposite ever denounce it, or does the NDP believe that this type of hateful rhetoric is okay if it comes from one of their folk?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we were elected on a strong mandate to protect choice and education and given that the Alberta Federation of Labour president, Gil McGowan, said on social media recently that choice in education will create nutbar right-wing warriors and given that the NDP had ample opportunity to denounce such divisive remarks, to the same minister: isn't it high time that the NDP demand the resignation of Gil McGowan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I wish I could say I was surprised that a senior NDP affiliate would say such hateful remarks towards parents of faith-based and home-educated children, but I'm not. After all, this is a party whose deputy leader and education critic has called hard-working Albertans sewer rats. If the NDP had any sense of respect for the parents of our students, they would stand up in this House today and denounce NDP affiliate Gil McGowan's hateful rhetoric. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The only person that has the call is the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the AFL and the NDP are one and the same, as two provincial seats are given to the AFL on the NDP's provincial board, and given that the AFL president, Gil McGowan, called the 80,000 children who attend charter schools or home schools, quote, religious nutbar right-wing warriors, and given that Mr. McGowan represents many union employees in this province who choose to send their kids to these schools, again to the Minister of Education: how can parents of independent faith-based charter schools have any trust that the NDP will advocate for their interests when they won't even denounce such blatant bigotry?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, it has been six days since Gil McGowan attacked faith-based and home education. The NDP have had six days to condemn his hateful remarks, but they have failed to do so. Since Bill 15 was tabled, the NDP have shown their true character. They don't support parental choice, they don't support faith-based or home education, and they don't support parents who choose those types of education. It's shameful, and the NDP must stand up in support of parents today and condemn their affiliate's remarks. [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Freedom of Speech and Racism Prevention

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year ago our NDP caucus spoke out against the Minister of Advanced Education's attempt to interfere with our academic institutions' independence. This independence is what helps maintain a balance for vulnerable students

to coexist with others, especially when marginalized students do not have the same access to freedom of speech. To the minister: have you crossed the aisle and consulted with groups and organizations, outside of John Carpay, to gain a holistic sense on this problematic initiative?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is correct. On this side of the House we absolutely believe in free speech and, moreover, believe in the importance of free speech on our postsecondary campuses, which is why last year I required all postsecondary institutions to develop comprehensive policies to demonstrate their commitment, which they were all able to do.

But I find it rich, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite wants to bring up this topic and hasn't taken the opportunity yet to denounce the comments of their affiliate and their boss Gil McGowan, who called parents of students who go into choice in educational programs religious nutbars and crazies. Let's hear him denounce them.

Mr. Deol: Given that consultations have not happened outside of individuals with direct lines to the Premier's office and given the UCP government's weak stance when condemning racist attacks on the Chinese consulate in Calgary and their own founding member's racially charged attack on a black federal MP, to the minister: are you not beginning to see a pattern? Why haven't you condemned any of these racially charged attacks?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to see a pattern, a pattern of those members standing behind the prejudicial comments that their affiliate Gil McGowan made. I haven't see any one of them yet get up and stand and denounce those comments. I've already given the member opposite an opportunity to do that, and he's refused. Let's see if he'll do it this time. All you have to do is just denounce the comments. Let's see if he'll do it this time around.

Mr. Deol: Given that we all know that when you're silent, you're complicit and given this government's own founding chairman and track record of removing grants specifically meant to address racism in our society and change protection for LGBTQ-plus students, to the minister: do you acknowledge that claiming to champion free speech but clamping down on vulnerable groups is counterintuitive? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, what do I say? I mean, I absolutely agree with the member that the silence is deafening. The silence is highly problematic. I gave him two chances already, and he didn't want to take any of them. I'll give him a third chance. It's very simple. He just has to tell this House that he absolutely denounces the comments that were made by their affiliate and member of their board Gil McGowan, who called – let's just remind the House – parents who put their kids into charter schools and other programs nutbars and crazies. Let's have him get up and denounce the comments. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Obstetric and Gynecology Services

Member Irwin: Last week 115 obstetricians and gynecologists wrote to the Member for Calgary-Acadia, noting that "the all-important relationship between government and doctors has plummeted into a poison well of distrust – it struck bottom in February with the shredding of the Master Agreement between government

and doctors.” These are the doctors that bring new Albertans into the world and keep babies and mothers safe. Did the member screw this relationship up so badly by accident, or is he purposely trying to chase these doctors out of Alberta?

The Speaker: I might provide some caution to the hon. member that I’m not convinced that “screwing a relationship up” would be parliamentary language.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to remind the Assembly and the hon. member that our commitment to our physicians when it comes to their compensation is \$5.4 billion. That is the highest level in the history of this province and the highest in the country on a per capita level. We’re very happy to have announced on February 20 a new physician funding framework, which allowed us to have the ability to react very quickly on certain matters, including the rural action plan to help the rural physicians throughout the province to be able to serve their patients the best, which would not have been able to happen under the old framework.

Member Irwin: Well, let’s hear what the doctors have to say. Given that they write, “We are deeply worried about the long-term viability of our practices, and deeply worried about the well-being of our patients; many of our colleagues have openly called for your resignation, as they believe that the relationship between you and doctors is irretrievably soured” and given that allowing these practices to fail is a direct attack on women’s and children’s health, when will the member stand up and acknowledge that he is putting the safety of Alberta mothers and babies at risk?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the rural action plan that we announced on April 24: a big part of that is also specifically to deal with obstetricians throughout the province, including the obstetricians in our rural communities. Now, taxpayers may not know this, but obstetricians have an insurance premium that they have to pay because their specialty is very complicated. It’s \$47,000, but because of the rural action plan, rural obstetricians and family medicine practitioners who may have to do some obstetrics are capped at paying only a thousand dollars. Taxpayers are going to pay the rest for those obstetricians.

Member Irwin: This member has quickly assembled a shameful record of attacks on women’s health, and this includes plans to close up to 28 rural delivery rooms. That’s on page 100 of his AHS review, by the way, but he’s only delayed this awful plan until August. Will the member right now commit that he won’t close a single rural delivery room, and if not, which of his UCP colleagues will never have another baby born in their hometown?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it’s ridiculous to see the NDP continue to attack the Minister of Health. We’re late in question period, and they just got around to asking the Minister of Health a question while he’s managing the largest pandemic in the history of the province or the first pandemic in a hundred years inside this province. Clearly, the hon. minister is doing a good job. I want to assure Albertans that this government caucus is proud of our Health minister. We stand with him one hundred per cent. Through you to the opposition: start doing your job. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North has the question.

Site Rehabilitation Program

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are struggling to make ends meet as many of them find themselves out of work due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, global recession, and historic blow to oil prices. The site rehab program is a welcome initiative for oil service companies, their employees, and the entire energy sector. Due to a very high unemployment rate in Alberta at this time, many Albertans are eager to get back to work. To the Minister of Energy: how can we guarantee that jobs will be kept here in Alberta for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you to the member for his question, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. The site rehabilitation program is a \$1 billion program using federal funding for the abandonment and reclamation of inactive wells here in Alberta. It’s expected to support over 5,300 jobs in the oil field service sector, a sector that is badly impacted by the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and the price destruction of oil. We want to maximize job creation here in Alberta. To qualify for the application, the grant application must be for a well here in Alberta, a site located in Alberta, and establish . . .

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that this is the first round of applications for the site rehab program and there is \$100 million allocated for grants during this phase and given also that there are many oil field service companies that will be interested in this program, to the same minister: are companies that are denied grant funding in this first phase able to reapply in later rounds?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

2:30

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-North correctly pointed out that round one of the application process has been rolled out. The good news is that there have been over 36,000 applications, which is phenomenal. The challenge is that round one is oversubscribed, so not all of the applications will qualify for round one. But there are many more rounds to come, and it’s a billion-dollar program, so there will be work available for a lot of companies for a very long time right here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the site rehab program has the potential to help many oil service companies, producers, and their employees and further given that there will be competition for these grants, to the same minister: will there be a limit on the number of grants allocated to a particular company to ensure that the grant money is distributed to as many oil service companies as possible?

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. The Department of Energy is continuing to review the 36,000 applications for round one right now. As of this morning they’ve gone through over 6,600 applications that have been reviewed and processed, and money is now flowing and rolling out the door. The overwhelming demand for this program shows that there’s a dire need for this funding and for jobs right across the province. We’re focused on working through all of these applications right now and ensuring that the

grant money is processed fairly and is distributed to as many job creators across the province as possible, including large and small operators and indigenous operators as well.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Official Opposition House Leader has a question.

Bill 19

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government introduced Bill 19, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. I hope that the goal of reducing smoking and vaping, especially among young people, does not have to be a partisan issue. With that said, there are areas where this bill seems to have stopped short of taking some obvious action. To the minister: why did the government neglect to take action on the flavouring of vaping products, especially when we know that flavouring is an industry technique to attract young users?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would note, actually, that Bill 19 does not fail to take action on this matter. Section 11 does enable, through regulation, the development of regulations to deal with flavoured vaping products. That's in section 11, I think it is, of the bill, so we are taking action or at least enabling the possibility for that to happen. But I do take the comment from the opposition that we could go farther in the steps we are taking at this point or at this time with Bill 19, which is to say, I suppose, that we're only doing most of what they failed to do in four years.

Ms Sweet: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that I thought I was being fairly puffballly in my question, I'm not quite sure why the minister felt the need to respond.

Given that British Columbia has done much of this work already and passed it into legislation in November and given that it would not have created any further delay of the bill to simply adopt the standards already in place in our neighbouring province and given that British Columbia also took action regulating the concentration of nicotine in vaping products, why is the government also delaying action on nicotine concentration, which is the most important factor in the addictiveness of these products?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would note that the federal Canada Consumer Product Safety Act does set a limit of 66 milligrams per gram. Vaping products with more than that amount are already prohibited in this province. Health Canada and, as well, our ministry are going to continue to monitor the situation when it comes to nicotine levels in vaping products, and if there is a need in the future for us to take action on that, we will at that time.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government moved quickly to ban flavoured tobacco products early in our mandate, specifically menthol, and given that I was prepared to present a private member's bill that would have moved quickly to protect young Albertans and given that a great deal of research and policy information is already available in Alberta and across Canada, as the minister has indicated, can the government say when it will provide Albertans with these unnecessarily delayed protections?

Mr. Shandro: Lookit, Mr. Speaker, I think what we had when we announced it yesterday and what Bill 19 proposes with the changes to the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act is for us to be able to take steps. I think they're fantastic first steps. Obviously, the situation when it comes to tobacco and smoking and vaping and our steps as a province to be able to reduce it for the entire province, including to take steps to reduce the rates amongst our youth: they're first steps. Our ministry is going to continue to monitor the situation in case there are further steps that need to happen down the road.

Driver's Licence Road Tests

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, for many Albertans getting a driver's licence is a rite of passage. It allows them to get to a job and have the freedom to get around our large and beautiful province. For good public reasons the Minister of Transportation suspended road tests in March, but that decision came with a big cost, and Albertans are getting fed up. It's now been more than two months, and the minister is a no-show. To the Minister of Transportation: what is the plan, when will it be released, and why are you dithering on this critical issue for so many Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the important question. I'm just a little disappointed that he thinks doing the right thing makes me a no-show. Anyway, having said that, I guess, let me say this. We know that a lot of Albertans need a driver's exam, and we know they need driver testing. We need to get school bus drivers trained for this fall, we need to get agricultural workers trained to get the crops out of the field, and just ordinary Albertans to drive so they can have a job or live their lives. We're working with the chief medical officer of health to establish criteria where we can start delivering those tests again.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that more than three weeks ago I asked you this question and I haven't received a response and given that the chief medical officer has said that this pandemic will likely be with us for many months, if not years, and given that the minister claims that he's been consulting with the chief medical officer on a plan and given that his dithering is causing economic hardship for Albertans and creating real problems, particularly in rural Alberta, where public transit and getting a lift from a friend is a much bigger challenge, can the minister inform this House when he'll actually be taking action, what is the backlog of road tests in this province, and can the minister prove to this House that he's a competent manager of his department and share the plan to get through . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would call someone incompetent for doing what they asked them to do, but that's okay. It's important. We are working with the chief medical officer of health. As soon as we get the go-ahead to begin the tests at full speed and get that transmitted to the registry agents and the driver examiners and organize the personal protective equipment, we will certainly do that. We know it's important. We haven't delayed, but as he may or may not know, we need to wait till we've got permission from the chief medical officer.

Member Loyola: Given that the minister is ultimately responsible for ensuring that road tests are conducted safely for both the tester and for the testee and given that we've heard that some driver examiners are refusing to get into private vehicles for a test because they don't know if they're at risk for COVID and whether the vehicle has been sanitized and given that all workers have the right to refuse unsafe work – and these concerns are entirely reasonable and valid – and given that we might not have a treatment or vaccine for COVID for months, years, or if ever, to the minister: what is your long-term plan for driver examiners, and will you force them to enter a private vehicle to conduct a road test before a treatment or a vaccine is produced?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, that would be a great question if the member didn't start by saying to hurry up and put the tests in place and then follow with: it's not safe to do the tests. I find that a little bit disturbing. However, the part that I agree with is the part that we won't put drivers in vehicles if they don't think they're safe. We are in the midst of doing what the hon. member suggests, which is creating protocols where the vehicles will be safe. The correct protective equipment will be in place, and then we'll be able to deliver those desperately needed tests safely. We're working very hard to come to that point.

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

COVID-19 and Small Business

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small mom-and-pop shops are crucial to our province's economy. They provide hundreds of thousands of jobs, they offer local and innovative products, and they keep money within the community. These small shops were hit extremely hard by COVID-19 and the lockdown that came with it. To the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism: what is our government doing to help these struggling businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The member is absolutely correct. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and a critical part of our communities. That is why our government took immediate action to relieve the pressures small businesses were feeling with among the highest per capita supports for small businesses in the 10 provinces, such as our \$350 million program to pay half of WCB premiums for small businesses and our \$450 million deferral of education property taxes for businesses.

Mr. Amery: Given that federal programs for commercial relief such as CECRA and CEBA have failed many small businesses due to the federal government's poor implementation and eligibility criteria and given that CECRA specifically bars many tenants due to extremely complex and stringent requirements, including complete dependence on landlords to trigger these benefits at all, and given that the province has exclusive jurisdiction over many of these relief programs which would directly benefit small businesses, Minister, what is our government doing to improve these programs and ensure that these businesses don't have to shut their doors forever?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his question. The Canada emergency commercial rent assistance

program is one that all provinces have signed onto, and we expect that Alberta's contribution will be around \$67 million in rent relief for eligible small businesses. We know this program does have some gaps, and that is why my colleague the Minister of Finance is continuing to tell the federal government that changes are needed to improve it and support Alberta businesses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:40

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that small businesses have very limited cash on hand these days, tight profit margins, and high overhead costs and given that many of these businesses have had to go weeks and months with little to no income and to offset expensive fixed costs such as commercial rent, heat, and water, what is our government doing to help small businesses get on their feet as the months go by?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for his advocacy for small business. As I've mentioned, we've implemented some of the most extensive measures to support job creators to date among Canadian provinces, but we also know that there is more to be done, and we're considering further measures to support small businesses in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Agricultural Concerns

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been hearing from many of the agriculture producers in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville about the challenges they are facing from last year and COVID-19. The 2019 growing season was challenging for Alberta producers, with poor harvest weather and an early snowfall, which resulted in more than 1 million insured acres remaining in the fields over the winter. To the minister of agriculture: what is our government doing to get help now to these struggling producers and streamline the process?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that very important question. As she very well knows, last year was a very difficult harvest, and for a lot of farmers it continued well into the spring, but AFSC had 118 dedicated crop adjusters that went strategically across the province to make sure that crops were adjusted so that farmers could make timely decisions so that they could take their crop off and get seeding under way. It's great to see that seeding is almost done across the province right now, but that's thanks to the hard work of our farmers, and it's something that this government will always support them in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there has been reduced operating capacity at major beef processing plants in Alberta, which has caused about 130,000 cattle to be backed up in feedlots, and given that the longer that producers have to keep their cattle on the feedlot, the greater the cost to the producers, can the minister explain how the fed-cattle set-aside program is helping our farmers and alleviating the substantial costs they have been bearing due to the side effects of COVID-19?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I'm sure everyone in this Chamber knows, 40 per cent of Canada's cattle herd is raised right here, and Alberta beef is our second-largest food export, valued at over \$2 billion. Due to COVID, as the member rightly pointed out, there has been a lot of volatility, especially in our fed-cattle system, and that is why we created the fed-cattle set-aside program, in which 30 per cent of the funds that we've committed as the province of Alberta in partnership with the federal government will go out initially in July, and we are working on creating a bid system that will carry them on well into the fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that COVID-19 has put a great strain on our Alberta hog producers and given that our Alberta producers represent over 10 per cent of Canada's hog production, translating into 2.8 million market hogs per year, can the minister of agriculture please advise what is being done to put money in the producers' hands now, and what programs do they have to be enrolled in to access the money?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Changes that we did make to AgriStability are putting \$25 million in the hands of Alberta pork producers immediately. That was when we changed the interim payment from AgriStability from 50 per cent to 75 per cent for our hog sectors. Increasing that advance payment will result in the equivalent of about \$20 per head for our pork producers in Alberta. Again, regardless of the commodity our farmers and ranchers are something that this government will always stand up for. Thank you.

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

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has a statement to make.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and Seniors' Funding

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been receiving countless calls from seniors dumbfounded that because of the UCP government cuts AHS will no longer cover the cost of seniors' driver medical exams. It is unbelievable that this government continues to nickel and dime Albertans by increasing the cost of fees and adding new ones, but unfortunately the \$85 cost for the base exam is more than just nickel and diming our seniors. Many seniors live on a fixed income, and driving is crucial to keep them active and independent. Without a licence the pharmacy, grocery store, and a trip to visit friends and family become far away. The added fee, \$85, will be a barrier for low-income seniors to keep their licence. While this government cuts funding to seniors, the UCP exploits the loophole so that they can take taxpayer money. It is shameful that this UCP government does not think Alberta's seniors are worthy of public funds and that their independence is not valued enough for investment by this government.

But Jason Kenney and the UCP have no issue taking Canadian taxpayer money for their own party, and the UCP's partisan work is a worthwhile investment of public funds. When a senior calls my office, I can proudly say that I strongly disagree with this cut and

that our NDP caucus will continue to fight for what is best for seniors in Alberta while the members on the other side are ignoring the struggles of thousands of Alberta seniors on fixed budgets, all the while pocketing hundreds of thousands of hard hit taxpayer dollars to bail out Jason Kenney's political party.

The Speaker: The hon. member will be very well aware that the use of proper names inside the Assembly would be wildly inappropriate. I expect he will govern himself accordingly in the future.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Choice in Education

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just last week Gil McGowan, former NDP candidate and president of the NDP-affiliated Alberta Federation of Labour, said on social media that choice in education will create nutbar, right-wing warriors. These are hurtful and shameful comments that need to be apologized for because not only do parents have a right to choose a path in their child's education, but it also implies that those who are religious are not capable of making reasonable decisions for their children. Is Mr. McGowan also offended by those who put their children in Sunday school?

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that Islamic, Christian, and other religious individuals have asked for school choice? Also, parents who are looking for alternative programs without a religious aspect have asked for choice. Mr. McGowan and the NDP will only accept you if you believe in one way, and that is their way. I'd expect Mr. McGowan, who represents roughly 170,000 Albertans as president of the AFL, to respect the diversity of those in his own membership, to respect those within the AFL who want school choice. How many union members of the AFL does Mr. McGowan feel are nutbars, and when will these members call for Mr. McGowan's resignation?

I would expect that the NDP would also condemn these remarks, respect diversity, and stand up for people who simply want choice in education of their own children. The NDP's silence on this is deafening, and as the Member for Edmonton-Meadows said, when you're silent, you're complicit. Mr. McGowan's AFL holds two seats on the province's NDP council, that oversees the party and their operations. With the range of choice within my own riding – Catholic and francophone and independent – how many of those parents is Mr. McGowan trying to insult and disparage as not having the ability to choose for their children the type of education they receive?

We live in a very polarized world, and in order to move past that, we need to support those who believe in honesty, integrity, and kindness, those who believe in family, community, and helping their neighbour through tough challenges.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has a notice of motion.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a notice of motion. I wish to provide oral notice of Bill 21, the provincial administrative penalties act, sponsored by my friend and colleague the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Bill 20 Real Estate Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 20, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, this bill continues the work that we started last fall with Bill 15, which addressed problems with the Real Estate Council of Alberta, or RECA, by dismissing the full council. The changes proposed in Bill 20 will allow for a restructuring of RECA to ensure greater transparency, increased accountability, and improved governance of the real estate regulator. These changes will prevent RECA from regressing to the state of dysfunction it was in before our government intervened.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader has a tabling.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a letter. I have provided a hard copy as well as an e-mail to the hon. Government House Leader in response to his memo, all correspondence being in writing. I have notified all members of my caucus to follow his request.

I also have the requisite number of tablings in regard to some fundraising e-mails that were sent out, specifically one from March 30, during the beginning of COVID-19, where the UCP is requesting financial assistance to pay their bills, with a deadline of March 31.

2:50

The Speaker: Thank you to the Official Opposition House Leader.

Just as a reminder of the new process for tablings, after you've completed your tabling, you can place it into the tabling boxes on the tabling tables.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide the appropriate number of copies of a round-table report that I referenced during debate on Bill 16, Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020, that was done by the Institute for Research on Public Policy, called Rethinking Criminal Justice in Canada.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has risen.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of correspondence received in support of Bill 201, the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act. First, I have one from SAIT, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, from president David Ross, who expresses his strong support of their programs for aircraft maintenance, engineers, and also their other technical and operational programs.

Secondly, I have one from Angel Flight Alberta, a nonprofit group who has volunteer pilots and operators to assist Albertans in attending medical appointments around the province. This is from their board of directors and volunteers as well.

Thirdly, I have one from West Peace Aviation Association, based in Beaverlodge, Alberta. The west peace aviation group president, Mr. Lloyd Sherk, is offering his support and also notes that Bill 201 will enable the sector to meet future demands and requirements.

Last, I have one from Peraton Canada Corporation vice-president Jim Gillespie. Peraton is a prime contractor to the Department of

National Defence and also to the Canadian air force and also is involved with an organization called SkySensus, which is a leader in UAS and UAV technology, research, and commercialization.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 2:01 the Government House Leader raised a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j) in regard to insulting language and language that will create disorder in the Chamber. At the time that I am referring to, I certainly think that you will have noticed that disorder was created as a result of the insulting language.

Now, the hon. member was asking a question in regard to the situation, a very tough situation, that is taking place around murdered indigenous women and missing indigenous women inside our province and in our country, a serious issue, and then referred to a dress, a red dress that had been provided to this Chamber about a year ago, officially by indigenous communities to recognize as a symbol towards that very, very serious issue. That hon. member, in response to an answer to his question from the indigenous affairs minister, who had referred to that dress, called the dress, and I quote: a pretty dress; it might be a pretty dress. Now, Mr. Speaker, I do not have the exact Blues. I do have an early transcript. But the gist of that language: that was the point of what he said.

That in and of itself, saying "pretty dress," would not be, I'm sure, in any book anywhere that says that that's unparliamentary language. The words "pretty" and/or "dress" or "pretty" and "dress" together certainly, in and of themselves, would not be insulting language. Nowhere that I'm aware, in the history of this Chamber or anywhere within parliamentary democracy, have those words been out of order or inappropriate for the Chamber but, used in the context of the way that they were today, referring to that object, I think, were certainly insulting language.

I just briefly want to talk to you about what that red dress was because I think it proves our point of the importance of that dress to communities inside this province and what it means and why that language would be insulting and why I think the hon. member should apologize for that remark. That red dress was presented to this Chamber in October of last year from two ladies from a healing lodge to, as I said, the minister of indigenous affairs. It was hand made, though, by a social worker at a shelter, named Emily Taylor, over a period of months, with literally tears put into the effort. I should mention, Mr. Speaker, that Emily Taylor lost a family member to being murdered and, of course, is an indigenous community member. The dress represents the memory and the spirit of all missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, that have left us too soon, leaving behind broken families, widowed partners, and motherless children. The initiative was launched in 2004 by the Native Women's Association of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, indigenous women and girls represent 4 per cent of the Canadian population but make up 25 per cent of all female homicides. According to a 2015 report by the RCMP, Alberta has the second-highest number of murdered indigenous females in the country.

Indigenous women have traditionally held sacred roles within their community, Mr. Speaker, as I know that you know. They were and are revered as life givers, caregivers, teachers, and healers. The red dress honours those loved ones who no longer walk amongst us but whose energy and spirit continue to guide us.

Mr. Speaker, from my perspective, it is beyond disbelief that that member would say that in this Chamber in regard to that object in

any way, particularly given that he is the former Indigenous Relations minister of this province. He certainly understands the importance of that object, of the symbolism of that object and what it stands for, and referring to it with certainly insulting language: that will cause disorder inside this place. I think it is incumbent upon him to rise in his place and apologize for that language so that we can move on.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to address the problem of my words in this House. People know that I've been a social worker for many years and worked in the area of family violence for over 30 years and am very passionate about the issue of violence. I have been working with the indigenous communities around red dress events for many years, even before I was elected, and welcome the gift of the red dress to the Legislature by the Awo Taan society. In fact, I was out just this morning for the convoy recognizing the one-year anniversary of the murdered and missing indigenous women's report being given out.

You know, one of the skills I don't have is containing my passion in thoughtful words all the time. While I was trying to take a poke at government inaction, I quite damagingly said something that appeared to disparage the dress, and for that I am deeply apologetic. I apologize to the minister, and I apologize to the House. I will continue my passionate work to support the work this government does and everyone else in this province and this country to bring an end to this genocide of murder of indigenous women and girls.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I appreciate the apology.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 15 Choice in Education Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate June 2: Mr. McIver]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to join in the debate this afternoon? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before speaking to Bill 15, I would as well like to acknowledge the first anniversary of the report from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and two-spirited people, and echo my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford's comments that we will continue to push for action and for answers. It's something that I've been quite passionate for a long time, and I know many folks who are working every day in our communities to address this issue. Thank you to all of them, if they're watching, and like I said, our hearts are with the families of all those who've lost women and girls and two-spirit family members.

Yesterday or last evening, actually – it doesn't seem like that many hours ago – I had the opportunity to stand in this House and speak to Bill 15, and for the benefit of those folks who didn't get a chance to watch at about 11 last night, I will echo a few of my comments. I want to talk a little bit about why I'm so passionate about public education. I noted yesterday that I'm a proud product

of the public education system, as are, I would bet, most folks in this Chamber. I grew up in rural Alberta. I spent most of my life, actually, in rural Alberta. I was born and raised in Barrhead, Alberta, and went through the school system there and, you know, I'm quite proud of the education that I received out in rural Alberta. I was inspired by just so many of the fantastic public school teachers that I had. In fact, you know, some pretty incredible social studies teachers in particular inspired me to ultimately become a social studies teacher and perhaps as well initiated a love of politics and, well, here we are. Here I am today.

3:00

The reason why I'm always so keen to share my love of public education isn't just because of my own experience as a student but my experience as a teacher as well. Not only did I grow up in rural Alberta, in Barrhead, but I taught in rural Alberta as well. I taught in two rural communities: Bawlf, Alberta, and Forestburg, Alberta. As I discussed yesterday, I'm really proud of being able to start my teaching career out in those communities as part of the public system, Battle River school division, in fact.

I'm also proud of the work that was done to improve public education under the NDP. Of course, you know, I was not a part of that government, but for most of the time while the NDP was in power, I was actually working for the provincial government, with curriculum primarily. I saw first-hand how passionate our MLAs were about protecting and enhancing public education, and I also got to see first-hand how much that government engaged not just with teachers, with administrators, with students, in fact, but also with parents. One of the things that I heard so much while I was in that work, particularly when I was helping to lead high school curriculum development, was how satisfied folks were with our public education system.

As I noted, that doesn't mean that there's not room for improvements. Absolutely. That's why I was so pleased and so proud when it was the NDP, under the leadership of the Member for Edmonton-North West as Minister of Education, that kicked off curriculum development in 2016, right? We acknowledge that while we have one of the best – and we still do – public education systems in the world, we have a little bit of work to do. I always use the example of some of our outdated curriculum documents. We have an arts curriculum that is older than I am, parts of it, junior high arts in particular, so when kids are at home learning about, you know, 8 millimetre recorders and that sort of thing, we know it's time. What do you call those? Videodiscs? Anyways, these are all things that are referenced in some of our – I don't even know what it's called. LaserDisc: that's the word I'm looking for.

Ms Hoffman: Film strips?

Member Irwin: Film strips, too. These are all things that are actually referenced in some of our current curriculum documents. All that to say that I will always stand in this House and defend a strong public education system here in Alberta – absolutely – with the caveat that there are improvements that can be made, particularly when it comes to curriculum.

Now, one of the things I talked about yesterday when I addressed Bill 15 was – I didn't just talk about my love of public education, my background, spending most of my career in education. I also talked about the fact that, you know, public education is an institution here in Alberta. We know that 93 per cent of parents in Alberta choose public education, public of course meaning public, separate, and francophone school divisions. Parents have unequivocally shown their support for public education in this province, and I like to talk about the example of Edmonton public

schools because it's actually a school jurisdiction that's been studied internationally, in fact. Yeah. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a deep history with Edmonton public schools as well and is quite proud of the fact that there's so much diversity offered within that public board: faith programs, sports programming. Amiskwaciy Academy is an example of indigenous programming.

Ms Hoffman: Ju-jitsu.

Member Irwin: Ju-jitsu. The list goes on. In fact, I read some of the examples yesterday. If you have an opportunity, go google "Edmonton public schools alternative programming", and you will see the list of options available.

Why I talk about my love of the Edmonton public school board and how they've approached diversity in education is that they've been able to effectively offer so much choice within a public system, including a number of faith options. One of the neat schools that's located in Edmonton public is the Edmonton Christian schools, and there are a couple of campuses actually. Again, those were absorbed – I don't actually know when that happened – into the public school board and have hundreds of students across the city that go to those campuses, so a number of faith options as well.

But what I talked about is my concern. I didn't get too policy wonky, but I did note that, in addition to my experience working directly in education, I had the opportunity to do a master's and half a PhD – I'm now admitting on *Hansard* that I'm a PhD dropout – on education. In fact, as I was doing my graduate work, I had the opportunity to study charter schools, and one of the papers I wrote kind of analyzed some of the concerns around charter schools not just in Alberta but in a number of jurisdictions around the world. Granted this was about 10 years ago now that I wrote this paper, but some of those learnings stuck with me as I started to read through Bill 15 and as I started to see a couple of concerns. The biggest concern for me is that by opening the door to more charter schools, we are potentially lending the situation to one wherein resources could be diverted away from what could be and what is a very strong public education system right now. Like I said, I am so proud of our public education system.

Now, what I'd like to do, just so that I don't run out of time, is introduce an amendment on this bill, and then I'll talk a little bit about why I want to reiterate the concerns around charter school.

The Speaker: If you can just pass the original, which it looks like might be in your hand, to the LASS staff and then all 95 copies. Of course, you're welcome to keep one for yourself. Once I have that, then I'll get you to proceed if we can, since we're a little short on pages.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I've not introduced an amendment in a while, so I appreciate that.

The Speaker: I'm happy to help.

Member Irwin: Thank you.

All right. So I would like to . . .

The Speaker: Hang on. We're just going to make sure everything is in order, and we'll give it a name.

Hon. members, the amendment will be referred to as RA1. If you would like a copy, please feel free to give indication by raising your hand. If not, the additional copies will be placed on the tablings table.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the engagement document entitled "Choice in Education" provided by the government during its media release in respect of Bill 15 does not support the content of the proposed legislation.

Allow me to have some time to explain why we are suggesting that Bill 15 not be read a second time. I talked about the fact that we've heard from countless Alberta parents. I can draw upon my experience hearing from countless Alberta parents as I worked in education about how satisfied they are with our current education system. They've told us that they want a properly funded public education system, they want a modern curriculum, and they want there to be supports in place, whether it be for special-needs students, and the list goes on.

3:10

Our concern is that when you look at the engagement undertaken by this government, there are a lot of questions. In fact, I've taken the time without being – I won't get too nerdy here on methodology, but I would encourage the members opposite, if they haven't yet, to read through the survey that I acknowledge in the amendment, the engagement document called Survey Highlights: Choice in Education. I'd like to draw those members' attention to some of the things that we see most concerning.

Now, this government claims that they've put forth Bill 15 based on what they heard from these survey results. Now, first of all, let's look at some of these results. These results – again, I'll try not to be too long here – are not generalizable to the Alberta population because, of course, folks are self-selected. We have 74,000 Albertans who accessed the survey in a number of formats. Now, duplicates were removed, and after that there were just over 57,000 respondents. I don't have the number in front of me, but I know that when I was doing the research last night, I was trying to pull up the numbers of parents that we'd engaged in some of our past engagements, including in curriculum. I say "we" because while I was not a part of the NDP government, I was of course working on curriculum development. I know we engaged over a hundred thousand Albertans in a variety of ways. So to say that 57,000 Albertans, to begin with, is an overwhelming representation of Alberta: obviously, this government cannot argue that. I'm not saying that they are, but they could not argue that.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, let's look at some of these other numbers. Again, I'd urge you to pull up the entire document if you will. What's most concerning is that when the survey gets into the actual question around choice – this is why we're discussing this bill today. I mean, the bill is all about choice, and as my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Glenora pointed out last evening at a quite late hour, you know, this government has an interesting perspective when it comes to choice because they're clearly quite pro choice on this topic but not pro choice when it comes to other matters. I digress. Here's where we raise the most concerns. I will direct you to the survey results that say, "overall satisfaction with amount of choice available", 61.6 per cent. The point being that most Albertans who were surveyed are satisfied with the choice available in this province.

I'd like to also point out that there were a number of survey responses that came in that were deleted, that were not considered in the responses because according to the ministry they said that –

let me just quote them. They analyzed some of those duplicate surveys separately. They didn't want it to impact "the demographic components of the overall analysis." Now, again, I'm certainly not an expert in methodology, but I do have some background, so I'm concerned when a large number of responses are eliminated from a survey, are treated separately. It was the minister, in fact, who claimed that these responses were all from a special-interest group that wanted to, quote, hijack that survey. Well, I find it troubling when a group which is made up of a number of passionate parents from all across the province, that their opinions are seemingly dismissed. It's quite concerning.

We also know that, you know, every person who submitted a survey response had to submit their own e-mail address. They had to have an individual piece. So to imply that a number of survey responses were kind of shipped in bulk is absolutely incorrect. Each of those survey responses should be included in that survey. If somebody in government can explain to me more clearly why those responses were excluded, I'd like to hear it, but I cannot see a reason for that.

Let's look at some of the other concerns parents raised.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was greatly appreciating the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, of course having deep experience in the planning of the education system as a teacher herself, and I was hoping to have the opportunity to hear her completed remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. I was just getting into some of the other issues that – I may have said "parents" a couple of times; I should say "stakeholders" because, of course, it's open to more than just parents. So forgive me if I did say that.

What's interesting is that some of the responses that folks provided are about choice but have kind of an interesting take. I want to share the first one. Resources. "Some responses... identified specific concerns related to resourcing and costs [like] transportation costs." Parents aren't saying that we need more choice in education; what they're saying is: hey, this is an opportunity that this government is engaging me; I want to tell you that we need resourcing. We need resourcing, whether that's investments in transportation, whether that's investments and supports for students with special needs, whether that's investments in curriculum. They took this as an opportunity to show what they wanted.

What else did they say? They flagged the removing of duplication of services. They flagged some of the concerns around, you know, the language of efficiency and cost savings. They raised their concerns about cuts to education. They talked about overall funding for education. They talked about the need for support for diverse populations.

So I'm calling on this government to take the time, if they've not done so, to read through the survey but to also read through the e-mails that you've received in your offices from parents around education. I can only speak for my office – I can only speak for my office – but I can tell you that I've received countless e-mails on education.

What are those e-mails about? They're not about school choice; they're about the cuts to education. They're from parents who've lost EAs for their children, parents who are concerned about the

ongoing cuts, about the need for updated curriculum, about the need for, you know, investments in some of the schools in my riding. We've got a number of old schools that have had some great renovations done but could use more. I get a number of e-mails about school nutrition programs. I can tell you that I'm not getting e-mails asking for an expansion of charter schools; I'm getting e-mails asking for investments in our public education system.

Again, I call on this government – and this is why we're asking for this bill not to be read a second time, because we feel that the engagement does not support this bill. Again, I welcome the members opposite to stand up to show me the data that they have that supports the overwhelming need for an expansion of charter schools, and when I get an opportunity again to speak on this, I'll talk more about some of the concerns that I have around an expansion of charter schools.

Again, as I talked about yesterday – I was, in fact, mocked and laughed at by members of this government when I said that you're accusing us of fearmongering. You're telling us to just trust you on this one, that it's not a big deal, and I said: "Trust you? Trust the government that said that they were going to invest in education and then fired 20,000 EAs who were working so hard to help the students as they transitioned to online learning? We can't just trust you on this."

If I didn't have the research from other jurisdictions that showed the slippery slope that happens when you open an education system up to charter schools, up to greater choice guised in privatization – and don't tell me all this isn't about privatization, because, again, we had a member just days ago in the House compare the privatization of liquor stores and of telecommunications to education. It's shameful, and that same member, the Member for Peace River, has been roasted on social media for those comments.

Albertans are proud of their public education system; 93 per cent of them send their kids there. We should be proud as well, and we should be in this House every day defending and strengthening public education, yet we are not.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members. I'll take this opportunity to remind everyone that we speak through the chair and avoid speaking directly to each other in this Chamber.

I will recognize the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had the opportunity to listen intently to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I just wanted to point out a couple of points. One, what she's proposing is that we don't move forward on the promises that we made to Albertans last year when we were elected. This is something that we reject, so I recommend to all of our members here to reject this referral motion.

This is something that many people in my riding that I talked to were very excited about. The concept of choice in education, the empowerment of parents to be able to choose what kind of education their children will receive is something that was very popular in my riding and throughout Alberta as I knocked on many doors during the last election. I'm not sure who the member is speaking to in her riding, but I would imagine that even in her riding she would find that there are many parents that would love to be able to see that expansion, of charter schools even.

Now, one thing that she said there was that there's ample evidence to show that charter schools – and she's going to talk about this in the future – are not a good way to go. I want to tell her of my own personal experience, through you, Madam Speaker. Many years ago I followed the advice of my father, who was a teacher, to

become a teacher, and I taught for two years. At that time I'd never made so little in all my life. Teachers make a lot more now, and I think that, actually, good teachers deserve to have that.

The concern that I have, though, is that when I started teaching, I taught at a start-up charter school called Foundations for the Future Charter Academy. It was in its second year. What's interesting is the interest of the parents in being able to provide this kind of an option. They wanted to get back to the reading, writing, and arithmetic. They wanted to be able to help their students have a very firm, solid foundation in those important skills. Now, move forward decades, and most people who know about the school recognize that this school has, I believe, 17,000 people on the wait-list.

Now, with supply and demand being able to determine equilibrium, you know what? You can find out whether or not there is a demand for something based upon that wait-list. It's interesting that we would try to put a cap on parents' choice in taking and having their kids go to that school, to that charter school. I think that for the last couple of decades I've been sad to see that they've been stopped in providing that kind of an educational opportunity for people in the Calgary area, so I was extremely excited when I heard that this bill would be taking off that cap so that parents would have more of an opportunity to be able to provide that educational choice to their kids.

I will say that, from my experience, when the government of the day introduced charter schools, as the saying goes, a rising tide floats all ships. What the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said is that we don't need to have charter schools, that we don't need to have these alternative types of education because the public system will do it itself. Well, that is revisionist history because the reality is that the reason why the public school system actually started going with these things was to be in competition with what the charter schools, the private schools, were doing. They wanted to be able to step up their game. But the only time that they actually started to do that was when you had that competition with those charter school systems and those alternative systems of education because there were now comparables. Parents were now able to say: "You know what? Why is it that I can't have this for my children in the public school? If they won't do it in the public system, then I will go to a charter system to be able to provide that for my kids."

That is the kind of empowerment that we on this side applaud, the kind of empowerment to parents that we applaud. This bill, I believe, will provide more empowerment to our parents, will raise the tide for all to be able to say: "You know what? We now have some competition, we now have some comparables that we can make. We need to do better."

I think public education does do a great job in many ways – my father was a public teacher for all of his life – but there are certainly areas where they can improve, and being able to have those comparables with charter schools, with other forms of educational models, I only think is a good thing. I don't know why the members opposite are so afraid of that. I think that if they are so concerned about the public education system not having what they need, then give them an opportunity to be able to see those things. Maybe they just have been so deep in the forest that they can't really see the trees.

I think that the argument that there's no benefit to Albertans would certainly be argued by parents that go to these charter schools or go to these alternate educational forms. My wife and I felt that it was important to make sure that our children had good, solid understanding of reading, writing, arithmetic, so we made a choice to have our kids do home-schooling for the first few years, not all of our kids but some of our kids. We did that because we felt that that was something we wanted them to have, a firm foundation.

The great thing about it is that it worked out well for our kids, and all of my kids are either going to university or have gone to university and getting a higher education now. This foundation that we provided for them was good for our kids. I'm not saying that it has to happen for everybody, but I was so grateful for the opportunity that I had in this province to be able to provide that for my kids. That parental choice allowed me to be able to say: "You know what? This is what's going to work for my kids." We applied that. And, you know, in hindsight – hindsight is always 20/20 vision – it has worked out, Madam Speaker.

I invite the members opposite to try to look at this as a way of being able to not just empower parents, not just empower the people who they represent but to also strengthen the educational system that we have in Alberta to provide us an opportunity, a window for being able to actually make our system even better. Like I said in my comments here, a rising tide floats all ships. This is a great opportunity for the public education system to be able to find that opportunity to raise their game, raise their standards in order to be able to provide better for Albertans. And I think that if they do a great job, Albertans will support them as they have been supporting them. This can only be beneficial to all Albertans, to our public-private-charter system as a whole. So I would hope that the members would be very interested in looking at this bill in that light.

But, as such, the amendment to stop the work that we need to do and that we promised Albertans to do last year when we were elected: I would recommend that all of our members would reject that and that we move forward boldly and courageously to be able to help this choice in education, as we promised Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to RA1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the amendment from my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, essentially noting that the survey which was conducted by the government in support of this bill does not in fact seem to support the bill itself.

3:30

Now, the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was just speaking, and he was speaking about how this was a campaign promise. Indeed, if one is to look at the UCP election platform from last year, they would see a promise there that they would introduce a choice in education act. Madam Speaker, that's about all you would see, that they would offer a choice in education act and that it would somehow improve choice in education. That is the sum total of the depth and detail which they offered the Alberta people.

Now, perhaps the hon. minister and some of his colleagues provided a good deal more detail about what they actually intended to do when they were out campaigning and talking to their constituents, and perhaps then those constituents he spoke with who said that they wished to have more choice in education appreciated the detail he provided, but the majority of Albertans were not provided with anywhere close to what we have here in the bill today. So to simply say that because there was a vague and general promise of something sort of leaning in this direction, absolutely anything the government brings in under that label has the support of the majority of Albertans, I think rings more than a little false.

So I appreciate the opportunity to actually have some debate about the actual substance of the legislation, which, again, I have not heard too many members of the government actually address. Indeed, the hon. minister, when he was speaking, talked about that many parents support the idea of having more choice in their child's

education. I'm curious to hear. He did not address what choices they actually feel they currently lack. In his constituency, in that area, he spoke of parents who are currently home-schooling. In fact, he spoke of home-schooling himself. So what choices do they feel they currently lack in home-schooling? What choices do they feel they currently lack in terms of schools they're able to access? What obstacles, in fact, do they feel have been in their way? I would be interested to hear that. So what are the choices that they feel they are missing? Indeed, when they have attempted to pursue those choices, what have been the obstacles that have been in their way?

Indeed, once we have that understanding of what choices are missing and what the obstacles are that are preventing those choices from being available, how does this bill specifically, then, address those specific obstacles? How does this bill specifically increase the specific choices that are missing, and how does it do that while ensuring that there are no negative impacts on any other aspect of education? There is a lack of clarity at present, Madam Speaker, about the problem that this government is trying to solve.

Now, this is unfortunately true for a wide breadth of the legislation that they are bringing forward, whether it's an Alberta parole board, whether it's the choice in education. They are bringing forward a number of things on which they are speaking very generally and very aspirationally, at times very angrily, but they are providing very little detail about the actual problem they are trying to solve. Frankly, Madam Speaker, we are not here in this House to debate lovely platitudes or aspirations or things that make people feel good. We are here to discuss actual challenges and issues in detail, and we are enacting legislation. That is a powerful thing. So if we are unclear about the problem that we are trying to solve, how can we possibly give due diligence to the solution that's presented? Far too many times with this government my concern is that they will only speak in these general platitudes because they do not want to speak to what their actual intent is.

Now, on this bill I did not want to stand here and speculate today about what this government's intention is, but I would appreciate hearing a good deal more detail from them about what specific choices your constituents are currently missing. What specifically have they wanted to do that they have not been able to do so far? I appreciate that the minister did refer to a specific charter school in Calgary, and his concern was the previous cap. To be clear, that is a previous cap that the government has already removed. My understanding is that the Minister of Education removed the cap on charter schools last year. Am I incorrect on that?

Ms Hoffman: You're right.

Mr. Shepherd: So the cap on charter schools was removed. So unless there is a different cap that the minister is referring to . . .

Mr. Hunter: Not the student numbers.

Mr. Shepherd: Pardon?

Mr. Hunter: Not the student numbers.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. Anyways, perhaps there is a different cap the minister is referring to, and I misunderstood.

I appreciate that he at least in that instance was able to provide a specific school, but there has been a decided lack of that from this government. That concerns me because as we are speaking on this particular amendment, the survey does not appear – and that is the survey after the minister went through and carefully edited it to remove particular responses that she felt were objectionable, that

she felt were from a particular lobby group. I have noticed, Madam Speaker, that this government is incredibly fond of designating anybody who doesn't agree with everything they want to do, who isn't willing to knuckle under and bow and scrape to their decisions, as a lobby group. The government is pushing this forward and has yet to provide clarity when this very survey that they put out specifically for the purpose of establishing that this bill was necessary does not support that conclusion. That leads me to question, then: what is the actual intent, and why are they bringing this forward? I would appreciate hearing that from this government.

The minister spoke about how a rising tide floats all boats. Now, I'm not one to belabour an analogy, but there are a number of problems with that. Again, it is one of those vague and happy phrases, Madam Speaker, which communicates very little actual information and says very little about the realities of what we know is actually a complex world. Particularly, the education system is a complex system where many things interact. It is not as simple as dump in more water, and everybody gets up. There's a question of how well built is each of those boats. Which of them have been left neglected to develop holes? It doesn't matter how much more water you put under them; they're still going to have to bail to keep afloat. Who's allowed on each of those boats? Charter schools are allowed to reject any students they like. What happens, then, when charter schools decide that they want to pick and choose which students they're going to admit? That's not casting any aspersions on any current charter schools but just simply recognizing that this is not a fully equal system we're talking about and there are considerations to be had.

Now, this government likes to talk about more freedom, more choice, and more autonomy, more opportunity. Indeed, the minister talked at great length about how this should be good for public schools because it provides us uptight, stuffy guys with a little competition. Now, I'm not saying that there aren't times when things become bureaucratic, Madam Speaker. Hey, I'm an MLA. I served on the government side. I served on the opposition. I've been involved in many different organizations. Any organization over time needs to be refreshed. Indeed, I would note that the governing political party did just that with its two legacy parties.

What I would say is that so far I have not seen that this has been a Minister of Education who has been interested in giving more choice and more autonomy to our school boards in the province of Alberta. I have not seen that she has been working to empower them to make better decisions or to be able to innovate or indeed even to look after their schools the way they feel they should. Indeed, she has done quite the opposite, and that is a habit that is becoming incredibly troublesome with ministers of this government: trying to consolidate more and more power in their hands and take it away from elected representatives of the people of Alberta. That is what I see happening with this Minister of Education. That is what I see with our Minister of Health with the help of the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, who seems set on undermining the folks that doctors across the province of Alberta choose to vote to protect themselves.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we are on amendment RA1 to Bill 15. I just wanted to remind you, and I suspect your comments are going to be tailored towards that quite quickly. Thank you. Please proceed.

3:40

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. I know that's a particular point of interest and something you care about very deeply. I will do my best to respect that.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: I mean no disrespect, Madam Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Addressing the Chair

The Deputy Speaker: That is certainly the way it came across. I would expect comments directed at the chair to be kept inside of yourself instead of aired out in public. It is a very serious matter to challenge the chair in this Assembly in any way, shape, or form. I suspect you may have some comments or an apology around that matter so we can proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: Madam Speaker, I apologize if you took my comments in that way. That was not my intent.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hope this pattern does not continue throughout the rest of the afternoon. I would surely like to give you the benefit of the doubt on what was not really an apology, but I will take it as such.

I will ask that you please proceed with the debate at hand, which, again, is amendment RA1 to Bill 15.

Debate Continued

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Continuing, then, to discuss this amendment, which is discussing the fact that the survey which this government conducted towards this bill does not in fact support this bill. Indeed, I was making comparisons with other steps that have been taken by other ministers of this government which align in a similar way to this very amendment which we are discussing on this education bill, about the survey not supporting the actions of the government, much as many other decisions are not supported by those which this government chooses to interfere.

Indeed, as the minister of red tape was speaking in his debate on this bill, speaking about the choice of freedom and continuing to observe that this government does not seem to support freedom in many other respects, whether that be in the education system or the health care system or others, this survey does not support what this government is claiming for this bill, much as I've yet to hear any support for this government's decisions around health care. It's the idea that the government feels that in this case, in education, we need to have more choice and that indeed it should not matter what is actually needed in a particular area but, rather, that that decision should be the sole province of the minister with no consultation with, say, a local school board as to what services are currently available or whether those programs could be accommodated under the current funding of the current systems available, which is likely why this survey does not reflect what this government says needs to be done. Much in the same way as this government insists that we must curtail the number of doctors in the province of Alberta, now we must have free choice in education, but this survey does not support the government's claim that there is a majority of parents that are concerned about this.

The suggestion is that it should be the sole province of a minister of the Crown to determine where a doctor can practise in the province of Alberta but that when it comes to education, a charter school should be able to set up anywhere without any consideration of what is actually needed for that community, that we can declare that there are too many doctors in Calgary and, therefore, there must be legislation to force more to go and work in other parts of the province but that in education it should be a free-for-all. Now, of course, again, we see that we do know that in this case it would be

at the whim of the Minister of Education, who, frankly, has not shown herself to be terribly collaborative or considerate of the actual school boards, which, unfortunately, goes against what we see here in the survey, which is part of the amendment which we are currently debating and which I continue on, which reflects that indeed the majority of parents are quite happy with the decisions that are being made by their local school boards and they are happy with the choice that is provided to them.

Again, I go back to the beginning of my remarks, and I ask that the government provide us with a good deal more clarity about what the problem is that they are trying to solve here. That problem is not reflected in this survey, and that problem has yet to be articulated clearly in this House. If they cannot tell us clearly why they need to enact a piece of provincial legislation, then I think there's good reason to consider that it should not be here in this House, which is why we are putting forward this amendment, pointing out that the survey that the government did on this particular bill does not, in fact, reflect the changes they are bringing forward.

Now, indeed that is also the view of many who actually operate the school boards in the school system. I recognize that the Minister of Education herself served as a school trustee, and I wonder if at that time she felt that the government of Alberta needed to take more power away from her and had to make sure that the people of Red Deer who elected her should have less say in what actually happened in the education system in that city.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate being recognized in the House today. I just want to begin my comments that I'm very proud to support Bill 15, the Choice in Education Act, 2020, because it was a platform promise that I ran under. In the very first line of the bill it pretty much sums up what that promise was: "Whereas parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that may be provided to their children." For me that's very, very simple. There is nothing nefarious or hidden behind that. It was straightforward and meant.

Now, in light of debating amendment RA1, I have a couple of questions. What is the basis for this amendment? It appears to be that it's because an engagement document in a media release doesn't support the content of the proposed legislation. Was the engagement document the only information that the ministry had to consider when they proposed this legislation? I would find that highly doubtful. What are we debating here in this Chamber? Is it Bill 15 and amendments proposed to it, or is it a survey that was taken? Was the survey on the final content of this bill? No, I don't believe that it was. Did the survey say that our education was a hundred per cent perfect and in no need of any change whatsoever? No, it didn't; 62 per cent is a long way from a hundred per cent, in my estimation. Did the opposition provide this survey and therefore dictate what questions were asked? No, I don't believe that they did. Therefore, are the opposition the best ones to trust in terms of interpreting the results of said survey? No, I don't believe that they are. I believe the ministry is.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Therefore, just having said a few of those simple facts, Mr. Speaker, will I support this amendment? No, I will not, and I would encourage all those in this House to do the same as this amendment has very little to do with anything substantial or helpful to correcting this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members under 29(2)(a)? You've got two and a half minutes.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I just want to take this time to respond to some of the points just made by the prior speaker on 29(2)(a) as well, the Member for Lethbridge-East, in saying that thousands of Albertans, mostly parents, but thousands of Albertans took the time to fill out this survey because they thought the government genuinely wanted to engage with them on this issue. They gave their feedback. Their feedback, a larger majority than the UCP got in terms of votes in the last election, said that they were happy with the choice that they had available to them. So the question, then, begs: if you're going to ask for feedback and ignore it, why ask at all? It seems like the member is saying: well, this feedback wasn't relevant; there were more factors to consider than the survey. Then why ask? Why ask Albertans to engage on this if you don't actually want to hear what they have to say?

I have more concerns with the validity of the survey even on top of that, and I'll be happy to discuss those in a regular opportunity for debate under this amendment that's being proposed. But I do have to say, I think, that to the 74,000 people who took the time to fill this out, saying, "Well, that isn't the only thing that we were considering," diminishes this bill entirely. The fact that this was released the same day as the bill says, of course, that the two should be interconnected. It was a survey about choice in education; this bill is titled Choice in Education Act. Of course the two should be interlinked. It was released at the exact same time as the bill was presented, so of course they should be inextricably linked.

However, the results from the survey do not reflect the intent of the bill or the actions within the bill, and that is why my colleague has brought forward this RA1 to give the government an opportunity to review the data that the government itself gathered, did a bunch of stuff with, and then later released and take it into consideration. I think that to answer the member's question about, you know, "Is this the only thing?" it was, certainly, the thing that was highlighted the day that the bill was released.

3:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Under 29(2)(a)? You have 30 seconds, member.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just noted earlier that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was discussing the methodology of this survey that the other side seems to be so upset about. I will note that that's a bit laughable coming from that side of the House, considering that their methodology for engagement, particularly during curriculum development was to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Sorry to interrupt.

Any other speakers wishing to speak to RA1? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak to RA1, moved by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, which reads the following. That the motion for second reading of Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Choice in Education Act, 2020, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the engagement document entitled "Choice in Education" provided by the government during its media release in respect of Bill 15 does not support the content of the proposed legislation.

I would be very happy to talk of – last night I had an opportunity to engage in this material as well, and I appreciate that we're here still in second reading, that we have this additional amendment.

I want to add a little bit to the stories that I shared about, you know, my background in public education and, of course, growing up as the daughter of two educators, but also that as a daughter of those two educators, they did not encourage me to become a teacher when I was completing high school, not because they didn't love the profession, not because they didn't love children, not because they didn't love their colleagues, but they didn't love the political climate that was at play at that time in the province of Alberta. It was the mid- to late-90s, and both my parents had taken significant pay rollbacks and felt like they were constantly under attack by the government of the day. I studied other things first. I studied math, I studied religion, and later ended up doing an education degree, majoring in math, minoring in religion, and then a master's in education.

So reviewing educational documents and educational engagement is not something that's new to me or, I imagine, many members of this Assembly. I imagine many of us have a passion and an interest in education and making sure that – like public service, I think that public education has the potential to leave the world better than the way it was found. That's the root that I come to this debate from or at least part of it. Obviously, that's not the only extent of my path to where we are today.

I want to go into these engagement survey results that we are discussing as they directly are referred to in the amendment and they are the rationale that the government has used for why they are bringing this bill forward. I haven't heard any member saying, "Yep. The survey says that this is what we should be doing," because, in fact, it doesn't. In the survey the majority in every single category from every single area in the province said that they were satisfied with the amount of choice that was available and the information about choices that were available.

I do want to talk a little bit about the 57,000 because that's something that's highlighted in this report. On page 7 of the report it talks about how only 57,000 were deemed usable for analysis, but, again, there were nearly 74,000 responses. There were thousands that were co-ordinated through e-mail that people worked very diligently to get people to say: you know, if you believe in the following things, add your name to the list here, and an e-mail will be sent to the minister saying what your beliefs are if you agree with these. Nobody was coerced. Nobody was forced to add their name to it. Thousands of people did, and it says right here on page 7 that those were omitted from the results. That's one big error, I would say, in methodology.

Another concern I have is that some people openly identified as not being from Alberta, yet here we are talking about engaging Albertans and using their feedback to drive government decision-making, and – guess what, though? – those people's responses were kept in. People who said that they weren't from Alberta, their responses were included as part of the data, but people who identified as Albertans and submitted their responses in a co-ordinated fashion, their responses are eliminated.

I also want to say that we FOIPed this. I know some members of the media FOIPed this. Many people wanted the raw data so that they could actually analyze it themselves. It took quite some time to get a response, and then when it came, it was nearly a \$5,000 bill that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition was asked to pay to actually receive the responses that the government already has in their possession. To me that also begs a number of questions such as: why is it that the government was so reluctant to actually share this information with members of this Assembly, with the public, and why is it that we're supposed to take this synthesized data – "synthesized" is in quotation marks, for *Hansard*. Still even the synthesized data overwhelmingly says that this does not reflect the values of Albertans, that we're all here in this place to ensure have a voice, to ensure have an opportunity to be heard.

The one thing I also want to add around the e-mail responses that were left out: the organization that was gathering these signatures to add to the e-mail correspondence is a Calgary-based organization primarily. It serves people all across the province, but that's a large number of Calgary voices, likely. Again, we don't have the data so we can't say definitively. We're going based on footnotes in the analysis section of a summarized survey, but that's a lot of Calgary voices that are being silenced from this survey and, therefore, from this Assembly. I find that concerning.

Let's talk about the 57,000, though, that were taken into consideration in gathering this summary for presentation to the media as well as to us here today. Nearly 19,000 were identified as being from the Calgary region; 17 and a half thousand were identified as being from the Edmonton region. It's interesting, because this was gathered all at the same time that there was a very focused and intentional attack on, I would say, the Calgary board of education and their credibility. While I won't defend some of the financial decisions that I know were made about a decade ago under — I can say his name. He's not a sitting member anymore — then board chair Dirks and later Education minister Dirks and with a signature of support from a Conservative Education minister at the time, who's name escapes me at this moment. They were encouraged to sign this lease that I think we all know was not a good lease. This was not done in a way that I think any of us would want to see taxpayer money spent.

This is sort of part of the backdrop, that while there was an intentional attack on public education in Calgary, Calgarians still, the majority, said: "You know, we really do believe that we have a good amount of choice. We believe that we have a number of different options available in our city and that the information on them is sufficient." The majority said that. Not every single person, but, again, why take a survey if you don't want to know what the people filling out the survey actually feel and believe? That's a little piece on Calgary.

The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction said: well, the reason why there's so much choice is because of competition. That is certainly one way to analyze this and look at it, but I would say that one of the reasons why there's so much choice in Edmonton, where I was board vice-chair and chair for five years, is because there was an intentional focus to welcome choice into the public system, as is evident by Talmud Torah being one of the first private schools to enter Edmonton public, the longest consecutive-running Jewish day school in North America. Many people would assume it would be in Montreal or in New York, but it's right here in Edmonton. We have the longest consecutive-running Jewish day school program, and it is under Edmonton public now because there was an intentional focus on welcoming choice and diversity from the private school system into the public school system.

Mr. Dach: In my riding.

Ms Hoffman: In the riding of Edmonton-McClung. Thank you, hon. member.

That is one. At the same time there was also a Ukrainian program, a Ukrainian bilingual program that also entered into the public system either in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I'm not entirely sure which. This was many, many decades ago, long before this government put some inflammatory language into a platform and into a campaign strategy.

4:00

The results show that the folks who filled out the survey, thousands of them, feel that there's a significant amount of choice available right now. Some people say, "Well, it just doesn't go far

enough," and so be it. So find ways to encourage and support choice while giving students, staff, and families the rights that are awarded to them under the systems that we do have.

I will say that I know a number of families who choose to home-school, and I met some new ones while I was door-knocking in both of the last two election cycles. One of the things that some of these families who home-school say is: you know, I chose it because I didn't want my child learning in a classroom for a variety of reasons. Often they are parents who have children with special learning needs and didn't feel that they were getting enough support. That's definitely the case today, having more than 20,000 educational assistants, who were tethered to students and to schools, discharged by the Minister of Education at the beginning of the pandemic.

Many will say: well, we chose to home-school because we wanted to figure out what other resources were available to us outside of a traditional school environment. One of those resources is actually being connected to a school. I often call them an anchor school, somebody that helps you feel grounded. You've got the flexibility to move around, but you've got a connection back to a school. One of those in Edmonton is Argyll school, which serves thousands of students who learn remotely all across this province. One of the things about being connected to a physical school and actual teachers is that when you hit stumbling blocks, you know somebody's accountable to give you support, somebody is there to help support you in your home education.

There was one mom who was talking about learning science and how there were so many additional costs now that she'd chosen home education. She really wanted her child to be able to engage in using a microscope, but a microscope is mighty expensive. I said: "Did you know? I think you can borrow supplies from Argyll school or at least go in and use some of their supplies in the school building at a time that works for you." She followed up, and she was able to access those additional supports to support her in home-educating her child but not have additional financial pressures because there was a school that she was accountable to and that was also accountable to her.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There are a number of things that this bill is considering doing, and we'll get into those at another time because, of course, we're focused on the connection to the survey results, as the amendment says. The survey, the data that's being presented to us — I would love to get all of the data. I would love to see the Minister of Education table all the responses. Feel free to strike personal contact information. I don't think any of us need that. But I think it's fair and reasonable for us to say that there were 74,000 responses; why did you only choose 57,000? What were the voices that weren't heard in that remaining, you know, nearly 20,000 responses? What were the voices that weren't heard? How do we ensure that they are guiding good decision-making?

I know the Speaker has many times stood in this House and talked about the importance of engagement and consultation. The engagement and consultation that was done here does not reflect the bill that is being produced. So not doing consultation, I'd say: not good. Doing consultation and ignoring the information that is responded to in that consultation, I would say is probably even more disrespectful to citizens. Either way, we all want good, thorough, thoughtful, engaged consultation.

I want to commend the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I know that somebody was criticizing the work that was done around engaging Albertans on curriculum. It was by far the most extensive consultation process, started, I think, the first year I was a trustee, in 2010 . . .

Member Irwin: Yup. Under a PC government.

Ms Hoffman: . . . under, then, probably Dave Hancock as Education minister, with the Inspiring Education consultations. I had the honour of attending some of those as a citizen and as a board member, and I spent many hours engaging with many parents, many educational experts, both in the K to 12 system and in postsecondaries, a variety of postsecondaries. The amount of engagement with folks around the concept of lifelong learning and being on career pathways, I think, was something that I was really excited about.

Does this bill reflect the survey results? Not at all. Does this bill reflect the engagement that was done over many years under many different governments? Not at all. So, then, why are we considering this bill in this form at this time? That's the question that we're here asking ourselves. I think there are probably deeper answers, but I will tell you that it's definitely not because of the survey results, because the survey results don't validate the bill that's being brought forward. They do not. If there are other survey results, the nearly 20,000 that were eliminated, that do, then, rightfully so, we should have the ability to see those as well.

There are a lot of people feeling uneasy about what – there was an award given not that long ago for being the most secretive government in Canada from the media to this current government. This is an opportunity to turn a new page, to present the full and robust data that is available, and to honour Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've always enjoyed the enlightened comments of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora when she speaks on any matter in the House but particularly with respect to education. Her experience in the field is something that everyone in this House and anyone listening to her would benefit from, and I certainly know that she's enlightened me on this occasion with respect to her comments regarding the survey results as well as the lack of continuity with the results and the actual legislation that has been brought forward by the government. I'm just wondering if, indeed, she might want to comment a little bit on the intent of the bill as far as who the bill is designed to serve. If, indeed, the survey results don't bring a clear message forward as to a demand for this legislation, just who might she determine this government is trying to serve by bringing the measures forward today?

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. I certainly don't want to assume false or unavowed motives to any member of this Assembly, but I will be happy to revisit some of the history that brought us to where we are today. In terms of the most recent provincial election a little over a year ago there was definitely a lot of rhetoric and accusation around motive for the then government and what was happening in education, and I'll tell you what was happening in education. Every single new student who showed up to school was funded. Every single new student who presented themselves to any school district – public, Catholic, francophone, charter, private schools, home-schooling, you name it – they walked in the door, whether it was the door of their own house or whether it was the door of a school building, and money followed that student to that school authority or to the individual family to ensure that they could receive the education that their family had chosen for them.

It was around, I would say, a guise – there was a commitment made to maintain or increase education funding, but of course

we've seen that that has not happened. The Finance minister about this time last year committed in this House that new students would get new dollars, and of course that wasn't the case. That was not funded in the budget. Then we had a spring budget this year that was rushed through very, very quickly on the eve of the pandemic. The minister a few days later said that schools needed to be shut down under the advice of the chief medical officer of health but not to worry. The budget that had just been passed just a couple of days earlier would stay intact, and those funds would still go – whether it's the parent who is doing home education or the private, charter, Catholic, francophone school, public school, the 2019-20 funding would be maintained.

But then, just less than two weeks later, that wasn't the case. That funding was cut; \$128 million, in fact, was cut, taken away from mostly educational assistants who were employed to support students who have special needs. These aren't just students who were learning in public schools. They are students who learned at home. They are students who learned in private schools. They are students who learned in charter schools as well.

4:10

I do believe that there is a significant effort to change the channel from the record on education and to actually direct false motives on to the Official Opposition, and we see that every day in this Assembly during question period right now, for sure, when the truth is that there seem to be these two different sets of rules, one for the government, and one for everyone else in this province, especially when it comes to taking taxpayer dollars. We were told that there just weren't enough taxpayer dollars to keep kids who have special needs well educated, that we just couldn't do that and invest in health care to address the pandemic. But at the same time that the government was firing more than 20,000 educational assistants, the government was asking taxpayers to bankroll their political party, asking for a taxpayer handout, something that conservative parties in this province and in Canada had opposed for many, many years. In fact, the now Premier had been very vocal in saying that he didn't think it was right for anyone to be forced to donate to a political party without their consent.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to RA1 on Bill 15? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will pick up where I left off just recently. I find it quite rich that the other side of this House wants to lecture anybody on methodology around engagement. These are the same folks who sat in government, and when they were doing curriculum review and rebuild, their method of engagement – and I speak to this because this is what happened in my riding. They said: oh, well, we're going to have an engagement session. Well, that's great. Fantastic. You had to apply to attend this engagement session. You were vetted to figure out who was on side and who wasn't on side. They only let certain people in to the engagement session, whereupon they were handed the K to 3 curriculum in paper on a table, given a few minutes to read through the whole curriculum. Then the papers were taken away from the parents, and they were told they could go around the room and ask questions to various people in the room. That's supposedly engagement. That's the methodology that they used to verify that they were on the right track with the curriculum, so I'm not going to take any lectures, nor should anybody on this side of the House take any lectures about methodology around engagement.

Secondly, let's talk about resourcing. We hear a lot of noise about resourcing. While the other side is worried about special-needs funding, I would submit that school choice, greater choice in

education actually does resource special needs, okay? I'll just use some examples, again, from near where I live in Calgary. We have Foothills Academy. We have Rundle College Academy. I think that their enrolment is about 1,100 students. Both of these academies specifically enrol students who are diagnosed with learning disabilities, so please explain to me how that is not resourcing special needs. I would submit that if you take away the funding, as the members opposite would like to do, from those independent schools, you're going to have a lot less resourcing for special needs.

Let's point out Westmount charter school in Calgary. It's the only congregated setting, K to 12, for kids with asynchronous development who are gifted. That's a charter school. It's the only one of its kind. There is choice, a choice that fills a need.

But we keep hearing about this survey that, you know, 62 per cent think there's enough choice. Fair enough. But guess what? About 40 per cent don't think there's enough choice. Guess who that is? Well, those would be parents of children who attend federal schools and on-reserve schools. I can tell you that I've seen choice in education also help to fill that gap.

I spoke in this House about the visit that I took to Mother Earth's charter school not long ago, last spring, an amazing school. They drive around and they pick the kids up, and they make sure they get to school. They give them a good education with indigenous values. They have a great sports program, even including golf if you can imagine that. That's pretty cool. It's a fantastic school that partners with other charter schools in Edmonton. Amazing work. Again, it's filling a gap where parents have indicated that they don't think there's enough choice. I think that works pretty well. Guess who else doesn't think there's enough choice in education? Parents of francophone kids. Guess what? I'll bet an independent or a charter school could fill that gap, too.

Resourcing. Let's talk about that some more. I keep hearing about how this government has cut educational funding. Well, again, I'll talk about Calgary because that's where my riding is. We recently saw the Grant Thornton audit completed on the CBE. Here's what they found out about funding. In '14-15 the funding was \$11,900 per student. The NDP government comes along and funding drops per student to \$11,200. The UCP government comes in and the funding goes up slightly to \$11,245 per student. Okay? Those are the real numbers found by the auditors. You can't fudge them. You can't just go around making up numbers. The auditor found the numbers. Those are facts.

Let's talk about choice in education in terms of methodology and teaching methodology. The other side seems to want to have one-size-fits-all for everybody. They talk about choice in the Edmonton public school system, and I have to say that the Edmonton public school system does a marvellous job on choice. Clearly, it's valued. That's good. But we have to admit that teaching methodology really does matter. It's not just the curriculum; the teaching methodology does matter.

Again I'm going to go to an example in my riding, Connect Charter School, that uses inquiry-based learning. They use effective technology. They use outdoor life experience to enrich these kids' learning experience. They do an amazing job. Guess what? They have a huge waiting list. So tell me that parents out there don't want choice in education. Foundations for the Future: huge waiting list. Aurora here in Edmonton: huge waiting list. If people didn't want choice in education, why are these lists so long?

Madam Speaker, I just at this point am absolutely gobsmacked that our intentions are even remotely being questioned here. You can talk about methodology on a survey all you want. It doesn't matter. At the end of the day this bill enshrines a fundamental right of parents to be the decision-makers over what kind of education their children receive. That's what this bill does, and it ensures that

that cannot be taken away by the stroke of a pen in a budget. That's important, and that's why this bill is here.

You can try to obfuscate this with talk about surveys, but it's the parents' fundamental right to choose their child's education, and that matters. I'll bet if we did a survey just on that question, you'd get 95 per cent to 100 per cent agreement on it. The government and bureaucrats, people in backrooms somewhere, shouldn't be making the decisions. Parents should be making the decisions. Parental choice in education: it matters. That's why this bill has been introduced.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:20

Government Motions

Firearms

20. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly
- (a) recognize that the criminal use of firearms primarily involves unlicensed individuals often using illegally smuggled firearms;
 - (b) express its opposition to the government of Canada's recent decision to amend regulations to the Criminal Code to prohibit the possession, transportation, and sale of certain types of legally acquired firearms by licensed, law-abiding citizens; and
 - (c) urge the government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to assert provincial jurisdiction in connection with these matters including replacing the Chief Firearms Officer having jurisdiction for Alberta as designated by the federal Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness with a chief firearms officer for Alberta designated by the government of Alberta in accordance with the Firearms Act (Canada).

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I must say that it's great to see you in the chair today. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and move an important motion on behalf of the government that is currently sitting on the Order Paper in my name, of course, Government Motion 20, as was said by the table.

Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to move this important motion today, not only because I think, I certainly know, that all members of the government support this important motion and stand with law-abiding firearms owners in our province. I hope that the Official Opposition will as well, that the NDP will. We'll see. I don't know their position, and I don't want to assume that. I look forward to hearing their response.

I move it on behalf of law-abiding gun owners all across this province who just recently saw Justin Trudeau and the federal Liberal Party do – you know, I was going to call it a gun grab. You know what it was? It was property theft, what took place inside the House of Commons. It didn't even take place inside the House of Commons with the elected House of Commons in this country. We know that would have been a shame if the House of Commons chose to do that. It was done by an order in council in the middle of the night behind closed doors by the federal Liberal Party. That is a shame.

We will stand up inside this Chamber today and over the next couple of weeks as this important motion is debated. We will stand up for our law-abiding firearms owners in this province, Madam Speaker. I would go one step further. I've been getting correspondence since I put this motion on oral notice, on our Order

Paper, from all across the country from law-abiding gun owners, encouraging us and seeing Alberta as the great hope in standing up to Justin Trudeau, like we are so many times. And we certainly are when it comes to defending law-abiding gun owners.

Madam Speaker, through you to all law-abiding gun owners across this province and across Canada: Alberta's got your back. I think that as long as this motion is supported, it will take us on the track to be able to get Alberta to stand up to Justin Trudeau, to stand up to Ottawa, and stand up with our law-abiding gun owners when it comes to the property theft that has taken place in Ottawa when it comes to gun owners.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about the motion in a little bit more detail, Madam Speaker. The first thing I would like to talk about is (a), the first portion of the motion, which says that recognizing "that the criminal use of firearms primarily involves unlicensed individuals often using illegally smuggled firearms." What that motion does in regard to (a) is that this House, the Legislature, the democratically elected body of this province, by passing it, will send a clear message to Ottawa that gun crime has nothing to do with law-abiding gun owners. That's a fact. That is a statistical fact that the federal government doesn't want to talk about because at the end of the day their goal has nothing to do with crime.

We've talked many times in this Chamber about concerns about crime. Gun crime is a concern, certainly. All crime is a concern. Rural crime is a concern. Urban crime is a concern. Crime is not acceptable, Madam Speaker. It's already illegal, too, by the way, which we'll talk about briefly in a moment. But the idea that law-abiding gun owners' guns are involved in large amounts of crime and are contributing in any way to the crime crisis that we have in different parts of this country, from the rural crime crisis that we're facing in rural Alberta and are combating here or to the gang violence crisis that they're facing in portions of downtown Toronto, the idea that law-abiding gun owners are contributing to that is false. It's a flawed argument by the federal Liberals.

The reality is a couple of things. Close to six in 10 firearm-related violent crimes in 2017 involved handguns, but in 2016 only 2.8 per cent of violent crimes were gun related in Canada; 78 per cent of police-reported violent crimes did not have a weapon at all or it was a non firearm-related weapon – 78 per cent of crimes have no firearm involved in them at all, many times no weapon at all, and a nongun or a non firearm-related weapon like a knife.

When there is – and this is what I meant with my first point, Madam Speaker – a crime that is involving a gun, the vast majority, over 60 per cent of them, involve handguns, not long arms. Now, I want to be clear. I'm not against handguns, either. I'm a proud restricted firearms owner in the province of Alberta, and that, to be clear again, does not mean that if you are a law-abiding gun owner and you own a handgun, your handgun will end up in a crime, because the stats just don't hold true when it comes to that.

In 2016 and 2017 about one-quarter of all homicides were gang related. That was up from 16 to 17 per cent over the year previous, Madam Speaker. I don't know about you, but do you think – I think, I should say, and I think most of my colleagues in the Chamber would recognize that gangs don't follow the laws. I would assume that if we went to Toronto and we took some time to talk to gangs – I haven't had the opportunity to be in Toronto talking to gangs. I don't know if any member of the House has; I'm assuming probably not. But if you were to ask the gang people . . .

Mr. Ellis: I have.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, actually, that's a good point. The hon. chief government whip is a police officer, so maybe when he rises to speak on this motion, he will be able to tell us about his

interaction with gangs and how many times when he's arrested a gang member, either involved in a crime involving a handgun or a gun or not, they had a licence, if they had registered their restricted firearm, if they had acquired it through legal means.

I'll be interested in hearing that because the fact is, Madam Speaker, that they won't have because gang members don't follow the law. If you're on your way to rob the local grocery store, do you think that everybody is in the car that they just stole on their way to rob the grocery store, and they say: "Hey, guys. Did you remember your possession and acquisition licence? Justin Trudeau really wants us to follow that registry."

It's a ridiculous argument, Madam Speaker, particularly when you know this: the U.S., the United States, is the source of up to 99 per cent of the guns, mostly handguns, used to commit crimes in Canada – 99 per cent of the firearm-related crimes involve guns smuggled from the United States. And I suspect that the smugglers don't have a possession and acquisition licence, either, when they're bringing them across the border. I could be wrong. And maybe the chief government whip talked to some smugglers, too. I don't know. We'll see when he addresses the Chamber later on on this motion.

The reality is that this is flawed. If this was truly about gun crime – which is something we should tackle; as I said, all crime is something we should tackle – if it was truly about the federal government wanting to deal with gun crime, they would be not wasting their time with people who are law-abiding, licensed firearm owners who are not breaking the law. Instead, they would tackle criminals. They would stop people from smuggling guns into this country, and they would take action on the people that they do catch doing gun-related crimes.

Madam Speaker, one of the biggest issues I think that has seen the increase in firearms crime and other crime in this province is the fact that the now Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau, when he became Prime Minister, one of his first actions was to get rid of the mandatory minimums and the tough-on-crime legislation that was brought in by the Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, the best Prime Minister this country ever had. That was his first action. So if this is a Prime Minister that says that he's concerned with crime, why would he reverse tough-on-crime action? Because he's not. This is ideological. This is that the Liberal government doesn't like gun owners, just like they don't like lots of rural Albertans or Albertans in general, it appears most of the time with their actions. They don't care about crime, because if they did, they would tackle crime. The number one thing they would do is to bring back Stephen Harper's mandatory minimums and tough-on-crime legislation and start to take it seriously.

In all of the time that I've had to deal with crime in my constituency, town halls, spoken about it in this Chamber – and I know you have as well, Madam Speaker, in the community of Airdrie, which has not been victimless in this pandemic that we've seen of crime. In all the time that I've communicated with every letter I've ever received on crime, not once – not once – did I think the solution was to go and attack law-abiding gun owners, farmers, and hunters, that that would solve the problem. You know what I always thought would solve the problem? If the federal government would start to take crime seriously again. Every town hall that we had on this issue, at the end of the day, was because judges were not taking crime seriously, particularly property crime, and the Criminal Code was not strong enough to deal with the individuals that were victimized in our communities.

4:30

That is the action that we need from the House of Commons and from the federal government if they truly want to tackle crime. We

need tough-on-crime legislation, we need serious consequences for those that are victimizing our communities, and we need the government to take that seriously. Sadly, they're not doing that. They're not doing that. Instead, they're going to attack law-abiding gun owners, and it's not acceptable.

I also want to talk about the mechanism that they used. Actually, Madam Speaker, let's take a moment here and just quickly celebrate that this is the only Legislature in the entire country that is back to normal in the COVID-19 pandemic, doing their job for the people of Alberta and making sure that we do democracy, unlike what's taking place in the House of Commons.

During that, Justin Trudeau – I see the Official Opposition House Leader laughing. We'll see. Maybe she's with gun owners; maybe she's not. I don't know. But it's not funny to see a federal government using orders in council with no democratic debate at all inside the House of Commons. They're reaching into our constituents' homes and taking away their legally acquired property, that they bought with their money and that they're using for legal purposes, with no reason. It won't help with crime. That's what Justin Trudeau did. That's what the federal Liberals did. It's unacceptable. It's incumbent upon this province and this Chamber to stand up for our law-abiding gun owners.

The second portion of this motion, that I'd like to quickly talk about, is in regard to the chief firearms officer. I could talk about this all day, but I've only got 20 minutes, so I'll keep this portion tight. [interjection] The Official Opposition House Leader said that she'll yield me her time, but I don't think that'll happen.

The chief firearms officer is the first step that Alberta can do. That does not mean it's the only step that we can do, but it is the first significant step that we can do to begin to stand up for the people of Alberta. I do hope that the NDP will support that because from my perspective and, I think, the majority of Albertans' perspectives, we need, certainly, a lot less Ottawa and we need a lot more common sense coming right here from Alberta. The number one way we can do that on firearms is to be able to appoint a chief firearms officer who is not anti law-abiding gun owners, who will stand up for gun owners and make sure that they can in a simple way be able to meet regulations and comply with our safety rules and be able to go out and hunt and target shoot and deal with livestock or protect their properties or their farms.

So that is the first step, and I want to stress that the second portion of that is beyond the CFO. I believe that's where we should start. When this motion, I hope, passes this Chamber, I do know that the hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General will take the instructions from this body seriously and will begin to be able to get to work on that. I'm sure he'll have more to say about that process shortly. But I want to stress that that's just the first step.

The other portion of this motion says: to then continue to take actions to protect law-abiding gun owners and their rights inside this province. Now, we don't have control of the Criminal Code. There are other court cases that have taken place that limit some of our ability to be able to fight the federal government on certain issues associated with this, but on other issues we may have some flexibility. By passing this motion, that is again, Madam Speaker, the democratically elected House of this province sending clear instructions to the Alberta government that we should do everything that is within our power to stand up for law-abiding gun owners and to stand up to the federal government. I urge – urge – all members of this Chamber to take that seriously, not to laugh at Albertans who are watching their property be stolen, not to support a ridiculous ideological agenda that will not help one of our constituents who are being robbed and victimized by crime.

We do know that the NDP did nothing the entire time that they were in power to help one of my constituents that were robbed.

They did nothing to help one of my constituents who were facing home invasions in rural communities or where their stores were being robbed on a regular basis. They did nothing. In fact, they laughed at them when they came to this Chamber – it was shameful, Madam Speaker – in the last Legislature.

But this is an opportunity where they can at least stand up for their constituents who acquired property legally inside this province and who used that property for legal purposes inside this province. I surely hope that they will do that and that for once – once – in the NDP's time in this Chamber they will stand apart from their close ally Justin Trudeau, that they will stand apart from their close relationship with the federal Liberal Party.

I know we saw how hard they worked when they were in power to be able to work with Justin Trudeau to bring in things like the carbon tax, that punished our constituents, to fight against pipelines, to protest against Keystone, to take the steps that they did to be able to stand with Justin Trudeau repeatedly in this Chamber. That was shameful, Madam Speaker. It was shameful, just like it's shameful when they stand on the Legislature steps with Extinction Rebellion and protest against our largest industry.

But when it comes to this, this is a fundamental right of not just my constituents and your constituents, Madam Speaker, but their constituents, too. It's their constituents, too. [interjection] I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the former Finance minister of this province, heckling away in his support for Justin Trudeau against law-abiding gun owners. Against law-abiding gun owners. This is his chance to stand up for law-abiding gun owners. Will he take the chance, or will he stand with Justin Trudeau? That's his opportunity right now.

Madam Speaker, I will close with this. Justin Trudeau's gun grab – it's theft of property from Alberta's law-abiding gun owners – will not be accepted by the Alberta government or the Alberta government caucus. The question is: will it be accepted by the Official Opposition? Time will tell. Is that where the NDP will be at?

If we pass this motion, we set ourselves on the trajectory to get our own chief firearms officer and then to take the necessary steps and everything that is within the power of the Alberta government to stand up for law-abiding gun owners, Madam Speaker. I think that this is the most important motion before this House right now, and I certainly hope it passes with unanimous consent.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Government Motion 20. The issue of violent crime as it relates to firearms is very important. Gun violence, as we all well know, has a significant emotional and physical impact on victims, families, and communities. Talking about what we can do about it as a government is very important. This motion has three subsections, that are each very different in their purpose, and I will address them all one at a time.

Section (a), regarding the criminal use of firearms, states that "the criminal use of firearms primarily involves unlicensed individuals often using illegally smuggled firearms." Typically in a motion like this there would be a source cited for the information that the motion is based on for us to know, for Albertans to know whether or not this is the case. I would like to know statistics on firearm crimes and the percentage of licensed versus unlicensed firearms. That would be good information to have.

The first section also talks about illegally smuggled guns. It doesn't say from where. It doesn't say if we are talking about Alberta or Canada or the United States or somewhere else in the

world. I cannot say if it is right or if it is wrong. There is nothing here to base an argument on. It just makes an assertion without facts. I think that the resolution of this Assembly should be clear and be based as much as possible on solid facts, not on what we think sounds right. So there is a serious gap in information in this section, which the government should have addressed prior to tabling and bringing this motion forward.

With respect to section (b), which speaks to action taken by the federal government, there can be no doubt that the issue of the federal ban on military-grade assault-style rifles is a very important one. It's important to remember that this ban came after the shocking violence in Nova Scotia in April, which I know is still causing pain and hurt in those communities and across this country in those who are living with that pain. I think we can all agree that gun violence is not just in cities but that it's also a danger in smaller towns and rural communities alike.

So the question becomes: should we do anything about it, and what do we do about it? This conversation is difficult, but I hope we can all agree that we must do something about it. When it comes to, "What do we do?" I recognize that that means having conversations. That is why I would say that Ottawa's decision to ban assault-style weapons, firearms, must be done in consultation with gun owners, it must be done in consultation with law enforcement, it must be done in consultation with racialized communities, it must be done in consultation with First Nations, and there must be clear objectives.

4:40

The way it was announced didn't inspire confidence or clear understanding. We cannot have this issue be subject to political calculation and closed-door decision-making. When it comes to the issue of gun rights and the issue of public safety, there need to be public conversations. We must strive for a balance that keeps public safety paramount while respecting the rights of Albertans. Albertans have a right to own rifles to hunt or engage in traditional harvesting activities or to defend their livestock from predators.

With that being said, I have to be clear. The proposal by the federal government doesn't appear to impact weapons used for those purposes. It doesn't impact the ability to hunt or to trap or to protect the family farm. It is the position of our caucus that owning a weapon is a point of personal responsibility as much as it is a right.

But when it comes to assault-style weapons, I hope we can all agree that no one has the right to own a weapon that discharges 600 rounds of ammunition in less than 60 seconds. These assault-style weapons do not serve a purpose other than someone's personal amusement or, as we have seen time and time again, the mass killing of a large number of people. Giving up the former to help prevent the latter is not an unreasonable overreach on one's rights. It is against that backdrop that we support the intent of the federal ban, but we completely agree that we need to have a deeper conversation.

As the Government House Leader mentioned, we should be representing our constituents. That's why I also want to talk about my riding and northeast Calgary in general. I'm sure many in my riding would want to be part of these conversations. Gun violence has been a deep concern for quite some time. There were more than 75 firearm-related calls in my riding alone last year, over half of which were deemed to be targeted attacks. I have attended rallies, I have attended community meetings, and, Madam Speaker, I have attended funerals linked to this violence. Families in the community want an end to it.

This is why we need to have a real conversation which includes people that have been impacted by gun violence. We cannot stand on the sidelines with this government for a blanket prohibition on these

conversations because there is clearly a need to have these conversations, and we owe it to those families and victims of gun violence that we do everything we can. This motion shuts down those conversations. We cannot support this as it stands now.

With respect to section (c), which deals with provincial jurisdiction, we take no issue with this section. I understand these officers are responsible for enforcing federal laws, and therefore the federal government bears the cost. The government move here, for the most part, is symbolic. As long as Alberta taxpayers are not asked to pay for a service the federal government is already providing, we are fine with this government asserting Alberta's jurisdiction wherever they deem appropriate.

We are also happy to support the creation of an Alberta firearms examination unit. We believe this is a good step, and we support the government in making it a success to efficiently prosecute gun crimes. However, when it comes to the Alberta Firearms Advisory Council, we are disappointed. The membership of the council appears to be exclusively composed of gun owners, and it has to include those with different views such as those who have endured violence and lost loved ones, those who have experienced domestic violence, and those who have background and expertise in public safety. As it stands now, it excludes more people than it includes. I can think of several people in my own community who would be able to provide an important perspective to this council. As it stands today, this council is missing many perspectives, and its expertise is narrow.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, based on the reasons I outlined, we believe that we need to have these important conversations. The way this motion is drafted has the impact of shutting down all those conversations which Albertans clearly want to have. Therefore, we will not be supporting this motion. I urge all members of this Legislature to not support this motion and engage in these important conversations because Albertans want us to do so.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Government House Leader for bringing this motion forward. I'd like to thank the hon. member opposite, of course, for his comments. Not surprisingly, coming from the members opposite, they are somewhat inaccurate.

Not surprisingly – right? – because fully automatic weapons are already prohibited, Madam Speaker. That's not what Justin Trudeau did. Fully automatic weapons are something: as he indicated, 600 rounds per 60 seconds. You know, I can maybe consult with my hon. colleague who is also a police officer. I certainly have never in my years seen a weapon like that, other than maybe the military or watching American news. Maybe one of the Americans has a weapon of that particular magnitude, but certainly anything that is automatic is already a prohibited weapon. Right there, when we talk about credibility, I would argue that the argument that he has made has, in my opinion, already been discredited.

That being said, the Government House Leader is correct in that, yes, I have spoken to gang members. I have arrested gang members. I've worked downtown in the streets of Calgary during a very, very violent time in Calgary's history, which was the early to mid-2000s, where we had gun violence on a weekly basis, where we had violent crime, stabbings that were occurring. Quite frankly, many of you in this room are probably fully aware of what is known as the gang-suppression teams, which were actually originated in Calgary. Of course, I know that, I think, Edmonton has their own version of the

gang-suppression team. But this was actually started in district 1, where I had worked.

It was led in an operation actually by myself, Madam Speaker. We had called it what was known as operation bounced. What we did is – in my belief, I believe that gangs and the gun violence and the people that were living in fear: that shouldn't happen. Good, honest people had a right to go out, go and have a drink with a friend. Good, honest people had a right to go out and have coffees. They should not live in fear of guns and gangs and violence, so I organized a group of officers along with Alberta gaming and liquor, along with fire, along with city licensing, and quite frankly we went and we took the streets back from those gang members.

So I've had a lot of experience in dealing with gang members, and every interaction that I came across, every gun that I was a part of, whether it be as a supervisor, whether it be as an officer who seized that gun – these are not law-abiding gun owners. It wasn't even remote. In fact, if I reflect on all the times I've been in situations where there has been some form of gun violence that is used in a situation that is not, we'll say, related to something personal like, you know, those horrible situations we deal with, God forbid, suicides and stuff like that – I'm talking about outright violent crime: robberies, muggings, all those sorts of things that are considered violent crime. Those are not guns that are used by law-abiding gun owners. Now, law-abiding gun owners might have their guns stolen by the criminal, which may in turn be used in an offence.

4:50

But to be honest with you, for the most part those guns are smuggled. They're smuggled in from the United States. You need to ensure that at those borders we are doing the proper checks to ensure that we have proper border security. In fact, when I listened to the Prime Minister, he wasn't really even citing any cases of extreme gun violence by lawful gun owners. I think he was referencing, certainly, some horrible situations in the United States. Again, it's two different countries, Madam Speaker. What is going on in the United States is actually horrific.

I know that, you know, on this side we certainly condemn all sorts of bigotry and hatred and racism. My last partner, before I retired, in the Calgary Police Service was from Sierra Leone. Awesome guy. Love him. Love him to this day. Probably haven't spoken to him in a little while, probably because I've been up here, but I tell you, I couldn't ask for a better partner.

You know, I want to talk a little bit about: there was a concern the members opposite had in regard to credibility. I see on the list here of biographies of the members on the Firearms Advisory Council, and I just noticed this: Rick Hanson, police chief Rick Hanson. They're concerned about credibility of people? This guy was recognized as probably one of the top police chiefs not in Canada, Madam Speaker; in North America. The progressive values that he brought into Calgary have not only gone across Canada but have gone across, I would argue, internationally. He was the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. Anyone in my travels, when I mentioned that I was a member of the Calgary Police Service, always goes, "Oh, did you know Rick Hanson?" "Yeah, I knew Rick Hanson."

How do you think we've had all this positive and progressive, we'll call it, when we're dealing with people that have mental health and addictions issues? That was Rick Hanson. That wasn't anybody else. When I started in the Calgary Police Service, it was frustrating. We had people with mental health and addictions problems, and we had no supports to help these people. It was Rick Hanson that came in and said: "You know what? We need to identify those people. We need to help those people. But don't get me wrong. There are people that are bad, and we're going to identify them as well, and

we're going to make sure that they go to jail, but we're going to help those people with mental health and addictions."

He's a good friend of mine, actually. I'm not even sure he even owns a gun, to be honest with you, but to characterize him as some sort of gun-toting, you know, part of, we'll call it – I know that anybody that even wants to talk to a UCP member: it seems the people on the left seem to attack. It's actually embarrassing that that member opposite would even have any concerns regarding police chief Rick Hanson. The things that he did for the youth advocacy centre, children all across Calgary and, I would argue, even just outside of Calgary that go, that we have a youth advocacy centre not just to learn about – it's not a museum about learning the history of the police service. It's about understanding – again, you've heard me say this in this House many times before – the principles of education, prevention, and intervention and making sure that those kids understand.

In fact, if you go into that advocacy centre, Madam Speaker, you will see gang members that I dealt with, who stood up, that are on video for these other children to see, that sit there and go: "Yeah. I was young. I was stupid. I made mistakes. Don't follow down my path." What he has done for the people of Calgary, I would argue, is almost immeasurable. I know the bureaucrats and all the, you know, accounting-type people want to see the stats. I can tell you that when you apply those principles of education, prevention, intervention, you save money. You save money by helping those people because that is what helps to prevent those people falling into some sort of a life that may lead down the road to guns, which is what this is about.

Yeah, I support this motion. I support the lawful gun owners and their right to have their guns, but what I don't support is going after the lawful gun owners. I can tell you that in my conversations over coffee with Rick Hanson, as I've known him, obviously, since I started in the Calgary Police Service, going on – it's kind of scary, Madam Speaker – I think, almost close two decades now, quite frankly, when we talk about the public safety aspect of things, it's not the lawful gun owners; it's the criminals. Those criminals do not care what Justin Trudeau did.

They don't care, quite frankly, what we're doing in here. That's why they're criminals. They have no intention of following the law. They have no intention of abiding by any sort of registry for a weapon, and they're going to do whatever means possible that they can to execute whatever goals that they have, which unfortunately impact the rest of us in some negative, negative way. Yes, we need to send that message out to Justin Trudeau. We need to send that message out clearly to the people and members opposite, that we are going to support lawful gun owners, that we are not going to support criminals, that we are not going to support hatred and bigotry and people that go after other people.

In regard to the Chief Firearms Officer, Madam Speaker, I'm happy to send any message to Justin Trudeau that is going to support Albertans and, you know, obviously, as one of the only people in this room, I guess, that maybe has a more intimate understanding of we'll call it the Chief Firearms Officer in their role to administer the PALs, to ensure that we have that relationship with the federal government so that people lawfully can of course acquire their firearms licences and ensure that those law-abiding citizens are able to acquire the firearms.

I know – I know – having conversations with many of my colleagues here, that they're proud firearms owners and proud and responsible owners. We've heard our member and friend from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, I believe it is, who's very passionate and an avid gun enthusiast. I mean, I know he's very proud of, you know, being able to have that right as a lawful gun owner. He's not a criminal. But those that are, again, are not going to care what Justin

Trudeau has to say. It's tough enough as a police officer, a former police officer, getting them to care what I had to say when I was on the street.

But I will say this, Madam Speaker, because I want to reflect on this and I think it's important and I know I'm probably running out of time. Sometimes I don't get the opportunity to express the importance of the pillars – again I will restate this – of education, prevention, intervention, that were created by my friend Rick Hanson. I think everybody in this Chamber, every Albertan, and, I would argue, everybody in the opposition should feel very privileged that this gentleman is on this committee. He will provide a sober second thought. He has a wealth of experience, and he is respected, again, not just in Calgary but in Canada and, I would argue, North America.

Madam Speaker, with that, I will thank everybody for the opportunity to speak. I know there are others that would like to speak on this particular motion, and I will say that I encourage all members of this House to support this motion.

Thank you very much.

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'm looking for a speaker. I saw the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour – in fact, it's an urgency – to rise in support of Government Motion 20. It really is my duty and privilege to stand up for legal gun owners in my home riding of Lacombe-Ponoka against the federal Liberals' shameless use of a Nova Scotia tragedy as cover for an attack on legal gun owners. This is an event that they're using for cover that was perpetrated by a deranged individual with illegal guns, that was in many ways botched by the police service at the time, all of which is clearly delineated in two recent articles in *Maclean's* magazine. Anybody who actually wants to read them should. Yet the Liberals shamelessly will use this event as cover for them to make an attack on legal gun owners.

The majority of guns used in crime are smuggled, stolen, and unlicensed. That is a fact. Legal gun owners, on the other hand, go through rigorous background checks and extensive training, and that is a fact. Our firearms industry operates to the highest safety standards and employs thousands of people in this country, and that is a fact. Why, then, Madam Speaker, I have to ask, are the Trudeau Liberals waging an all-out attack on legal gun owners and not real criminals? Indeed, they dismantle the laws that would hold criminals accountable and, in fact, go the other way and create laws to protect the so-called rights of violent and criminal individuals while at the same time being perfectly willing to create a system of law that victimizes good citizens, innocent people who are not doing anything illegal.

The answer is simple. This new ban is all for show, and it's all ideology. The Liberal left agenda is to strip Canadians of the right of ownership and of the right of self-preservation. These laws do not target criminals. They target law-abiding citizens. They do not take criminals off the streets. They make legal gun owners into criminals. Madam Speaker, these regulations are nothing more than a ploy of the Trudeau Liberals to erode legal gun ownership, and it's no coincidence that this order was rolled out in the middle of the worst public health emergency in a century. The Liberals wanted to hide this undemocratic order under the cover of a pandemic and use a terrible event as cover as well to try and push it forward.

Well, I have news for them. We have heard it loud and clear in the west here, and we will speak out against it. People in my

constituency, Lacombe-Ponoka, know how much of a farce this order really is. Any gun owner knows that the term "assault weapon" is a made-up scare tactic from the left. It's dog-whistle language, and it's shameful that the opposition members would continue to use that same false language for weapons that have been illegal in this country for decades, that are not being used. It's just simply dog-whistle language to try and scare people and try and push an agenda. True assault weapons are not used in this country except by complete and absolute illegal criminals. Here in Canada we already have some of the strongest gun regulations in the world, and the list of 1,500 models and variations of these so-called assault weapons is a complete joke. These Liberals are so uninformed about these things that some of them seem to think that if a gun has a plastic stock, it's an assault weapon. They don't even understand what it is.

Last month the shooting society of Canada wrote a letter to Trudeau calling for amendments to the ban. Why? Well, because the order actually outlawed the weapons used in Olympic events and other shooting events. Madam Speaker, our Olympians do not deserve to be the target of this ineffective, ridiculous ban. Farmers and duck hunters don't deserve to be the targets of the same kind of treatment. Licensed, law-abiding gun owners in Alberta and across the country do not deserve to be the target of this ineffective ban pushed by our federal government and Justin Trudeau's Liberals, and it's shameful that the NDP would continue to support their friend and buddy Justin Trudeau and the Liberals. I agree that we need to be tough on gun crime. This new law does nothing to tackle the real issues of gun violence. I think that the Liberals are willing to go after law-abiding citizens because they're actually afraid to go after the real problem. They're afraid to tackle the gangs and the importers that bring these things in.

I want it to be clear: being tough on crime does not mean being tough on legal gun owners who are respectful citizens. The money that will be used in this ridiculous buyback program could be better put towards tightening security at the border, which the Liberals won't do. Stopping the flow of smuggled guns would be a lot more effective. Why do we hear nothing from them about that? When the Trudeau Liberals turn a blind eye to this, it exposes their false motives and what they're actually doing. They should not be turning a blind eye to organized crime, to criminals, and to illegal importation into this country. Why do they turn a blind eye to that? Cracking down on guns and drug lords that fuel crime would be far more effective than this new gun program. I just don't understand why they would continue to turn a blind eye to that and essentially allow it to continue while attacking legitimate citizens.

Safe, law-abiding, standup gun owners in Alberta and across the country should not pay the price for evil and violent crimes and criminals out east. Yet this new law is coming from a Prime Minister and a party who have lost their entire representation in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and I call on all Albertans and Saskatchewanians to make sure there is never another Liberal elected in the west in the history of this country.

Since the beginning of time tyrannical governments have sought to keep their subjects subservient by denying them the right to defend themselves, first by restricting self-defence in law and then by taking any and all weapons of self-protection away from them. As far back as 1689 the English Bill of Rights in England allowed Protestant citizens of England to have "arms for their defence suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law" and restricted the ability of the English Crown to interfere with Protestants' rights to bear arms. This is what the Liberals are trying to destroy and defeat. They are trying to dismantle these basic rights that have been part of our English and western heritage for decades, for hundreds of years.

In rural Alberta there is rarely a police presence near enough to protect citizens or prevent a crime in progress. Quite often, well, almost always, they show up after it's too late, if at all, quite frankly.

Madam Speaker, I must support this government motion. It is our duty to use our voice in this House to speak up for what is right and speak up against what is wrong. This gun ban certainly is not right, and it's my duty in this House to represent the constituents of Lacombe-Ponoka, and I call on all citizens, individuals, coalitions, and organizations to mount a vigorous campaign to drive these bullies and the federal Liberals out of our country.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise and address the House regarding Government Motion 20, which I'm very happy to support. The federal gun ban has been front of mind for a lot of my constituents. A lot of the correspondence that I've received over the last few weeks has been in that regard. People are quite upset, and rightfully so.

To look at the motion, it has three parts. You know, we're recognizing that

the criminal use of firearms primarily involves unlicensed individuals often using illegally smuggled firearms.

That is a fact. We can provide those statistics for the opposition if they'd like to see them. And:

express [our] opposition to the government of Canada's recent decision to amend regulations to the Criminal Code to prohibit possession, transportation, and sale of certain types of legally acquired firearms.

And then the last part: to urge this government

to take all necessary steps to assert [our] jurisdiction in connection with these matters, including replacing the Chief Firearms Officer

with one appointed from Alberta, one of our own.

5:10

I'm in full support of this motion. I wish that I didn't have to stand in the House today in support of it. It is such a ridiculous political game being played by our Prime Minister under the cover of COVID, under the cover of night in an order in council, a unilateral, undemocratic move that is meant to create more division within our country and is in no way out to make this country a more safe place in regard to firearms.

I've been able to be pretty vocal about this within my constituency. I have probably spoken to hundreds of my constituents, and what really gets them is that this feeling that the term of "assault-style weapon" or "assault rifle" is being used disingenuously to confuse and mislead. You know, we've seen some recent polling in the largest papers in the province, and it says that there are lots of people that agree with that term, that assault-style weapons should be banned. What does it really mean? As our whip clearly indicated, fully automatic weapons are already prohibited, are banned. What we're talking about are semiautomatic weapons. This arbitrary list of 1,500 guns that has, you know, pellet guns and has coffee companies and websites, and then they throw in a rocket launcher and antitank weapon. That is obviously illegal. It is just ridiculous and meant to confuse and divide.

The people that I'm hearing from in Drumheller-Stettler are everybody from the elderly couple in remote, rural Alberta – I told a story in this House last session about the couple where the criminals entered their house at gunpoint and duct taped them on the bed and scared them completely out of their minds and then threw a knife on the bed at the end after they were robbed and were

told to cut themselves free if they could. Stories like that. I have not dealt with gangs like the hon. Member for Calgary-West except I have heard the stories about the kid that's home alone phoning his parents because they can see through the binoculars that the gang members from the gang that they know exists or that the police know are there are coming down the road holding weapons. Then the parent having to say: go get the gun; I'm going to be home in 20 minutes.

We need firearms. We need firearms to protect ourselves, to protect our families. Some of us have different realities in remote, rural Alberta, where we can rely on the police but in different ways. We can't call them and expect them to be there in five minutes. It might be an hour if they can find your yard in the dead of night. We have a responsibility to protect our families and our people.

This federal gun ban that listed the arbitrary list of 1,500 firearms, where there is still confusion over bore size, where we think that it might actually outlaw 10- and 12-gauge shotguns – every competition shooter, every hunter: these firearms are owned lawfully, and they're owned to provide, you know, sport, recreation, utility. I'm a rancher. There are firearms on our place. If you have livestock, you have dead stock, and you also have every phase in between. Animals get sick. Animals get hurt. Animals require that care from me as their guardian. Sometimes you have to put things down. It's not pleasant, but that's part of my responsibility in that role.

The other thing is about property. Do you support this Liberal minority government arbitrarily deciding that someone who has been honourable, law abiding their entire life – the next morning they're a criminal? Is that something that we want to pursue in this country or stand up and speak against in this House?

This is a common-sense motion. I think everyone in this House should support it. I think the opposition should reconsider supporting it. The claim that these weapons can fire 600 rounds in 60 seconds: I don't know where Machine Gun McCall got that, but that would be impossible as you would have to pull the trigger that fast. That is how it works. A semiautomatic weapon discharges a round every time you pull the trigger . . .

Mr. Ellis: Five.

Mr. Horner: Five? That's right. Thank you.

. . . and there are other regulations beyond that for clip size and magazines.

I just wanted to say that the other comment I'd give is that of these constituents that reached out to me, hundreds of them, none have said: "So how does the amnesty work? How do I do this? Where do I take the firearm? How much are they going to pay me?"

People are not going to do this. The RCMP does not want to enforce this. Many of my friends that are RCMP officers are also gun owners. They say that it's complete BS. If that's unparliamentary, I apologize. I already shortened it to the initials. Yeah, I would just say that it's complete nonsense, and I'm happy to support this motion. I'm happy we're doing this. I wish we could do more, and I expect that we will try.

With that, I'll cede my time.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Well, thank you. I'd just like to take a moment to thank the member for his advocacy on this. I know he's been standing out in the media and speaking up for his constituents as well, and I think it's very important that we do that.

I'm a responsible, I think, and proud gun owner and rifle owner. I have been ever since I was a little kid. I think my first real weapon of choice was a .177 calibre crank-barrel pellet gun, and I think the

most dangerous part of that gun was the pounds and pounds of lead that I left around the neighbourhood or out on the farm there, because we used it all the time, constantly, as kids and got a lot of experience on gun safety and proper gun use with that gun.

A lot of my friends and neighbours are responsible gun owners, and they've been very affected by this Liberal assault-style gun ban. I'm going to make a couple of comments, and then hopefully you'd like to comment on that as well. One of the rifles that is a big concern is the AK-47 assault rifle. If you owned an actual AK-47 assault rifle, well, I guess it would be illegal here in Canada as it is.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But that same rifle, that same style of gun, is available in a .22 calibre single-shot semiautomatic. Just because you dress something up to look that way doesn't make it that way. I used to have a security guard who worked for me when I took care of a facility here in Edmonton, and at nighttime he used to get dressed up in a ninja suit. It actually had the toes and everything, right? But just because he dressed up like a ninja didn't make him a ninja by any stretch – I can guarantee you that – no more than dressing Trudeau up like Einstein would make him an Einstein.

Anyway, also, that AK-47 assault-style is available in a paint gun, so is that next on the list? Is this how far down the road we're going to go? This is how ridiculous the Liberal government is. When they put this ban in place, they had absolutely no credibility because they have absolutely no experience in this, and they didn't consult anybody before they put this ban in place. They just took advantage of a situation and floored this.

I'd just like to know if you have any further comments from your constituency or the folks that you're representing or on the style of weapons that are being banned and how ridiculous this is.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that, Member. I want to add another question, if I could, just briefly. I know we're limited on the amount of time for the Member for Drumheller-Stettler. In his speech he just touched on violent crime and home invasions and people being tied up. I don't think people realize the extent of the violent crime that is occurring in rural Alberta, and certainly I know the NDP didn't quite understand that.

You know, during the last session we attempted to do an emergency debate on rural crime, which they did not agree to, so they weren't able to hear the stories from the people who had violent crime, violent home invasions with weapons that were – though I wasn't the investigating officer, I certainly would question that they were lawfully obtained. If he could touch a little bit more on the violent crime in that neck of the woods.

Thank you.

5:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler has approximately a minute and 20 seconds remaining.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-West for that question. It's really sad to see the level of fear that there is in rural Alberta, especially in certain areas and hot spots where it's almost tragic. Business owners that are not even trying to reopen anymore – and this was before the COVID crisis and our economic pain we're feeling now – are just scared. They're fed up. They've been robbed at gunpoint enough times that they're willing to move on and try something else.

It's quite sad, especially when you're out in rural Alberta. You're doing what you love, you're proud of where you live, what you do, but in doing so, you know that you can't rely on the police in that

same way, that you have to protect yourself and your family. And these stories are scary. You know, we have young families out there. We have to rely on ourselves, and sometimes we rely on firearms to ensure that they're safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time for 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate on the government motion? The hon. the Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by saying that I myself am a licensed, proud, law-abiding firearms owner, and that's why it's an honour to rise here today to speak in support of Government Motion 20. This motion was introduced by the government to represent our opposition to the recent federal government gun ban. The federal government recently introduced an unconstitutional order-in-council gun ban on thousands of law-abiding gun owners. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made swift action to move forward with his ideological agenda and, in doing so, classified thousands of legal gun owners as criminals.

I and my caucus members have a deep concern about violence and gun crime – all crime, actually – that occurs in our constituencies and across Canada, yet this new law does nothing to properly address the issue. It only punishes law-abiding gun owners. I want to make this clear: the new federal gun restrictions do nothing to tackle the real issue of gun violence in our country.

I want to touch a little bit on just what the member opposite, the Member for Calgary-McCall, was talking about before. I have a lot of family. My mom's entire side of the family grew up in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and my heart and sympathy and condolences go out to all of the people that were affected by the recent situation in Nova Scotia. But I think he brought up something that I want to talk about that actually backs up what we're talking about here: a lot of the misguided information. Both of the weapons used by that particular individual, including the Ruger Mini-14, were illegally obtained, and in that situation the RCMP noted that they were brought, through illegal means, across the U.S. border.

I think that supports what we're talking about here when we're going to address the situation. The majority of gun-related crimes come from these illegally smuggled guns that come across or through our borders, and I can't stress enough that as a government we should be prioritizing our resources and our taxpayers' dollars in going after the criminals who continue to break the law and smuggle thousands of illegal firearms into our country, criminals and smugglers who will continue to obtain illegal firearms and distribute those firearms even with this ban. That's the reality. They don't care about this ban. They will not stop doing what they are doing today.

In my riding of Highwood I have many law-abiding gun owners that are engaged in legal firearm activities: skeet shooting, clay shooting, hunting. Many of those newly banned firearms: many of my constituents who are on farms use them every day – every day – in their life, many of whom have reached out to me and expressed their deep concerns about what's going on with this. To put it mildly, the law-abiding gun owners in my area are displeased, angry, and overall they feel violated due to this recent federal government decision. Mr. Speaker, I could stand here all day and share some of the very unparliamentary language that individuals have shared with me to express their frustrations about what's going on right now, but I will do my best to stay parliamentary.

To sum up their comments on this criminal ban on firearms, they have told me that it's misguided, rushed, undemocratic, poorly written, riddled with complete ignorance, full of complete incompetence, and to top it off, it's a violation of civil rights and

completely unconstitutional, a decision that was made unilaterally and executed in a manner that avoided debate in Parliament and, in doing so, violated the right of our elected federal MPs to share their constituents' voices in the House of Commons. As a result, they have ignored the voices of law-abiding Canadian citizens.

To top it off, this decision has been made by a federal government that has zero representation in this province. The government of Canada should not be punishing law-abiding gun owners. Rather, they should go after the root of the problem, the criminals who continue to break the law. With Government Motion 20 we are also urging the province of Alberta to move forward with all necessary steps within our provincial jurisdiction to protect and properly represent law-abiding gun owners in our province. This includes the replacing of the Chief Firearms Officer, who was once appointed by Ottawa, by one appointed by Alberta, for Alberta. This is another step of more Alberta and less Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, I support this motion as it is a signal of strong opposition to the government of Canada's decision on prohibiting possession, transportation, and sale of certain types of legally acquired firearms by lawful citizens. This motion as it is stated is an acknowledgement of the concerns of Albertans. It also identifies that we recognize the real issue. This government, unlike Ottawa, understands that the criminal use of firearms primarily smuggled in from across borders is the real, direct threat to public safety.

Mr. Speaker, I was elected to represent the individuals of my constituency of Highwood, which I am very proud to do. I will continue to tirelessly represent them and their voices in this Legislature, but I want to point out one comment that was made to me by a retired RCMP officer. He was very frustrated in his e-mail. You could just tell. He'd spent his entire life standing on the front lines defending and protecting individuals across all of Alberta. He's a sport shooter, and I'm just going to give a quick quote: I was a law-abiding gun owner, and with the stroke of a pen from Ottawa, Justin Trudeau made me a criminal, and I think that is very unfair.

As a gun owner myself I fully share the same concern. Almost two-thirds of the firearms I currently own were passed down to me by my father. Firearms that I have right now that were given to me that were passed down from him I have a real personal connection to. They were part of very important memories for me growing up, hunting and shooting with my father. I myself have spent numerous hours with my children – Caden, Ty, and Trystan – enjoying the sport of shooting in a very safe and responsible manner. This is a part of me raising my boys. It's very important for me. I hope to continue to pass these firearms down to my children. They're part of my family legacy. It infuriates me to think that some of these firearms now stand to be taken away due to the complete ignorance and the completely misguided ideology of our federal government.

My commitment right now is to make sure that we don't waste taxpayers' dollars. That won't make for safer communities. For those of you that actually support this ban, some of the members opposite, if you're really going to look into actually having a positive effect, really making a difference in this country, I beg you to look into the data on this. Read the reality. There are so many supporting documents that'll prove that this will not work, not in the way you think it will. There's so much data out there that actually refutes that it will actually be the answer to gun violence.

5:30

I, too, want to do everything possible to make sure that I advocate for a safe community and that we deal with crime and violence. This is something I strongly share with my entire caucus, but this federal ban is not the answer. I'm proud to stand with this government because it actually has its priorities straight.

We've already passed Government Motion 41, that recognizes and supports the ability of Albertans to lawfully and responsibly own and possess firearms. Today again I stand in strong support of Government Motion 20.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge all members to support this motion in this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. government whip has risen.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Highwood for his comments. You know, call it coincidence, happenstance, but as he was reflecting, of course, on his constituency, I could not help but recall the situation regarding one of his constituents, Mr. Eddie Maurice, the horrific circumstances. Let's go back and reflect a little bit because I'd certainly like to hear the member's comments in regard to this. Let's remember this. By the way, let me just say for the record that I, of course, have talked with Mr. Maurice. He's a very nice individual, and I got to hear first-hand from him what transpired on that particular evening.

What I know from what was relayed to me by Mr. Maurice is that he had a situation at his farm, which is a very isolated area within Highwood, where a crime had taken place. He had called the police, and the police never came. That was concerning for him. He's a good person. In fact, Mr. Speaker, prior to being arrested – and we'll get to those charges in a moment here – he had never received as much as a parking ticket. This was your good, upstanding citizen in the province of Alberta, not a criminal but a good Canadian, an Albertan within the province. Now, that being said, the police never responded.

Then there was the infamous night where he was at home alone with his daughter. His daughter was a very young child. Please correct me. I remember she was three, four years old at that particular time, certainly very young, a toddler. The little girl had gone to bed, and his wife was out of town. Eddie was there at home by himself with his daughter, protecting his daughter, of course, when some security lights had gone off on his property. That raised a concern. Then next thing you know, Eddie is looking out his windows, and he's noticing that people are rifling through one of the cars in front of his house. Now, unbeknownst to him, of course, at that particular time – but we learned that down the road – was that these individuals were on drugs. I'm trying to recall here. I believe that crystal meth might have been the drug of particular choice for those individuals at that particular time.

I would like the Member for Highwood to reflect. Now, many of you have talked to me, and I've spoken at town halls. Mr. Speaker, I've spoken at a town hall for you, quite frankly. I as a police officer will never tell anybody what to use in regard to the use of force. The only thing that I will say is that the law will state that you use the reasonable force that you believe is necessary to protect your property and, of course, your family in this particular case.

Now, I'm not going to question. I'm not going to judge. Mr. Maurice, fearing for his safety, understanding that only a short time earlier he'd had an incident in his house at which time the police never showed up, went out to confront those assailants. It's not for me to judge. It is certainly the choice that he made. He used a firearm. I would like to ask my friend, my colleague the MLA for Highwood – Eddie had a weapon. It was a gun. I don't know. I never asked him what the gun specifically was, but let's maybe assume it's now on the prohibited list of the federal government and Mr. Trudeau. So now you take that gun away from him.

Knowing full well under the totality of the circumstances that he had no faith that the police were going to show up, because only a

short time earlier the police didn't show up, what's he to do? He's worried about his daughter. He's worried about his property. He's been the victim of crime. Is he just going to go out and confront these individuals who, clearly, according to, I believe, the records, were high on drugs, which I believe, again, to be crystal meth? What is he going to do? I'd like to know what the Member for Highwood has to say on this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: You may like to know. Unfortunately, the time has expired for 29(2)(a).

We are on Government Motion 20. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate this evening? I'm seeing the hon. Member for Peace River in this case.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy and honoured to rise in this House to speak to this motion. I implore all members, government or otherwise, to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a firearms owner. I am. I'm also offended by the recent regulations from the Trudeau government, but I'm not offended because I'm a firearms owner. That's not it. That's not the whole story. I'm offended because violent gun crime disgusts me. I'm offended because I believe genuine action should be taken in this time, especially given the circumstances we've undergone in this country. I think there needs to be real, meaningful action in limiting access to these illegal firearms, that are the cause of so much of the tragedy, the absolute devastation and carnage that happens because of violent gun crime. And that is the root of our problem in this country.

In this caucus we have mothers, we have police officers, and we have teachers. We represent a good number of individuals across this province who have an interest in limiting violent gun crime. That's what we care about, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're standing here now. The problem we have with the actions taken by the federal Liberals and the minister of public safety is that these actions are not limiting it. That's why I'm offended. That's why I'm disgusted by the fact that they've had an opportunity and are not taking it, not because I'm a firearms owner. I believe that the vast majority of these legal firearm owners are equally concerned, not just because of the fact that their firearms are at risk. It is because they, too, like Canadians across the country, like Albertans in this House, are outraged by violent gun crime, and it's not being addressed again.

I want to take a few moments, Mr. Speaker, to highlight some of the chronology of the concerns I have and why I don't trust the Trudeau government and the actions they're taking against law-abiding gun owners and not taking action against illegal, violent gun crime, that tears apart families and takes lives of Canadians sooner than otherwise should be.

First, I want to look at the announcement they made on May 1, where Minister Bill Blair said, quote: I want to assure hunters and farmers and target shooters that in this country nothing we are doing today or in the future is intended to interfere with this lawful, responsible, legal activity; however, we are today ending the ability of owning weapons that are not designed for hunting or target shooting.

It seems like he made his policy position very clear in that speech. The concern is when we get to the 5th of that same month. The Canadian Shooting Sports Association published a legal opinion they had done on the new regulations passed by order in council by the Trudeau cabinet and announced by Minister Bill Blair. The legal opinion draws into question whether 10- and 12-gauge shotguns are included in this ban because of the bore diameter and are thus subject to the prohibition just the same.

5:40

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister of public safety federally accidentally included what he didn't mean to. As the CSSA says, "Either . . . Mr. Blair [is] too inept to comprehend the scope of [his] new regulations" – very concerning. Continuing the quote: "or [he] lied" to the government and Canadians. I don't know which way you want to split it, but either way it's very disconcerting.

I looked, then, to see the minister's response. Continuing on May 5, later in the day, he tweets two things.

Earlier today, the [CSSA] issued a statement alleging that our government is banning 12 and 10 gauge shotguns. This is absolutely incorrect and we will be reaching out to them to correct their misunderstanding.

Both 10 and 12 gauge shotguns are under the 20mm provision, and thus not subject to the prohibition.

Well, I'm glad he tried to reach out. The problem is that in the meantime, as we can see, anyone who's an avid reader of the *National Post*, an article today highlighted how the RCMP is still adding retroactively a number of firearms to the firearms reference table that are now prohibited. I don't think that reaching out went too well, Mr. Speaker. Included in that, according to the *National Post*'s own survey, are an estimated 200 guns retroactively added to the list.

It includes shotguns that are now allegedly within the 20-millimetre provision, which, the minister said, are not supposed to be included, including the Webley & Scott wildfowl gun. Sounds to me like a duck-hunting gun. It would continue to read the single-shot duck gun made by W.W. Greener, a single-shot, Mr. Speaker, for duck hunting. That surely is not an assault-style rifle. Surely, this is outside the scope of his intention. Nonetheless, it's being added after the May 5 correction on Twitter. Thank you, Minister Bill Blair. Thank you very much, but we'd rather you just backed off completely at this point. It's clear that you're either lying or inept, either of which is very concerning.

You can understand a lot of the concern that firearm owners in the province have, such as myself. I'm a firearm owner. I only own two guns. I own a duck-hunting gun, as I mentioned, and I own a second gun. It's a No. 4 Mark I Lee-Enfield. Gunnies love to talk about all the numbers associated with theirs.

I'm not a big gun owner, but I do like my rifle, and I'll tell you why. It was made in 1942 in Canada, a place called Long Branch. It was designed by the British, and it was used as a service rifle by the Canadian infantry during World War II. In fact, it was used by the Rangers in northern Canada, including in my communities, up until very recently. It's the longest-serving service rifle in the world that I know of, and I stand to be corrected. I've since sporterized it, which some might say is a crime in and of itself, but I do use it for target practice. I hope to be able to get a bison in my riding, which we're known very famously for up north.

The gun itself is designed to be an assault rifle. That was its intention. It's also the most common farm gun. It's part of our history. Every Canadian that came back from the front had one of these. It became the rifle that was on the farm for everyone whenever you needed to get out the gun. As my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler mentioned, because he has livestock, he needs to have access to that. It's an assault rifle, Mr. Speaker. By any stretch of any definition it is. It's designed for that. But it's repurposed to good ends, good, lawful ends. I myself am one of the owners of those guns.

I'm very concerned about the federal government and the steps they're taking. I'm concerned, one, because I believe they're not taking action on violent, illegal gun crime that kills people, that takes lives. They're not taking action when they should, and I'm outraged by that.

But then, secondly, incidentally I'm concerned as a gun owner that my duck-hunting gun is going to become illegal retroactive to May 1, 2020, and I'm not going to know it. I'm concerned about the ineptitude of this federal government, the minister blundering about with legal firearm owners, the most responsible citizens we have, as we heard from the whip earlier, and that they're going to continue down this path. That's my concern, Mr. Speaker, and I find it really disconcerting. I find it disconcerting, and I'm not alone. I'm not alone. It's not just gun owners that see this. It's a province and it's a country increasingly waking up to what the federal government is doing with private property, with law-abiding citizens, with orders in council they have no idea what's going on with.

On behalf of my constituents, firearm owners or not, I'm going to vote for this motion, and I'm encouraging other members to do the same. I think it's of the highest importance that we as a province stand up for our citizens and for the rule of law and stand up to a government that increasingly blunders ineptly into subject matter they have no idea on without concern for the citizens which they rule over.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, we are on Government Motion 20. The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that this debate on Government Motion 20 be adjourned.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 4

Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020

Ms Hoffman moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 4, Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period)

Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 4, Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment June 2: Mr. McIver]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 4, amendment REF1. Is there anyone wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are back on second reading of Bill 4, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency (Fixed Budget Period) Amendment Act, 2020. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate this afternoon?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or allow the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to close debate on second reading. The hon. minister, should he wish.

Mr. Hunter: I close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:48 p.m.]

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