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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, June 3, 2020

Day 25

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 3, 2020

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, members. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 19

Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to move second reading of Bill 19, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Order. Members, I just want to take this opportunity to remind all members that if there are discussions that you would like to have that perhaps are loud enough for all members to hear, that should either be done when you have the call or perhaps in one of the side lounges.

If the hon. Minister of Health could please continue, and if we could please restart the clock as well. Thank you very much. You'll have the full 20 minutes should you so choose.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is obviously a topic that many members in the Assembly are passionate about.

Mr. Speaker, we are living through extraordinary times, and with our attention focused on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, it could be easy to forget that we have other public health issues to address here in Alberta, and one of the issues is smoking and vaping.

Bill 19, if passed, would further prevent and reduce the health harms of tobacco products and address the alarming rise and the use of vaping products, particularly among our youth. For the past six years we've all witnessed the increasing number of youth accessing and using vaping products. In 2014-15, Mr. Speaker, 8 per cent of students in grades 10 to 12 said that they had vaped in the previous 30 days, but by 2018-19 that number rose to 30 per cent; 1 in 3 students. As vaping rates among youth skyrocketed and parents, teachers, and other Albertans sounded the alarm, the previous government, unfortunately, did nothing about it.

We know that vaping has immediate as well as long-term health risks such as lung damage, nicotine poisoning, and addiction, and we've also witnessed the recent emergence of vaping-associated lung illnesses and even deaths. We may not know all of the long-term health consequences of these products, but we do know that they have health risks, and vaping behaviour can model and normalize smoking among our youth. That, too, is very concerning. Smoking, addiction to tobacco products, is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death here in Alberta, and Alberta has the second-highest rate of smoking in the country.

Now, if we don't do something now to reduce these numbers, we are going to see considerable cost to the health care system as well as the devastating cost to individuals and their families. In fact, if we don't address the issue now, it is estimated that the health care costs from smoking alone will be \$6 billion over the next four years. Currently Alberta is the only province without legislation to address vaping, and that simply is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 19 would reduce the risks of smoking, second-hand smoke, and vaping by aligning the purchase, sale, promotion, possession, and consumption of vaping products with current restrictions on

tobacco products. Then it would go further. The minimum age to purchase or be in possession of vaping products would be 18, and government-issued identification would be required from anyone purchasing vaping products who appears to be under the age of 25. Now, vaping products would not be allowed to be displayed and promoted in convenience stores anywhere.

Bill 19 would provide additional restrictions on both smoking and vaping products and rename the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act to the tobacco, smoking, and vaping reduction act.

Sales would not be allowed in temporary or mobile locations such as pop-up tents or through vending machines, and as with smoking, vaping products would not be permitted to be sold in health facilities, public postsecondary institutions, pharmacies, or retail stores that contain a pharmacy. To reduce the risk of exposure to second-hand toxins and denormalize smoking and vaping behaviour, Bill 19 would also expand the list of places where smoking and vaping is prohibited. This includes places where children are often present such as school properties, playgrounds, public playgrounds, public outdoor pools and splash pads, child care properties, sports and playing fields, skateboard parks, bicycle parks, zoos, and outdoors theatres, in vehicles in which a child is present, and on hospital and health care centre properties.

All these new restrictions, Mr. Speaker, on smoking and vaping will be enforced. There will be fines and consequences for youth who possess or consume these products as well as for those who think it's okay to sell or otherwise put smoking and vaping products in the hands of minors. The proposed legislation in Bill 19 is informed by evidence and the concerns, insights, and the expertise of thousands of Albertans who participated in the review of the existing legislation.

Now, we heard, Mr. Speaker, from Albertans that the availability of flavours is important to the success of smokers who are seeking a less harmful alternative as a means to quit. Health Canada restricts the promotion of certain flavour categories: confectionary, dessert, cannabis, soft drink, and energy drink flavours. Health Canada also has the regulatory authority to further restrict the promotion of flavours. At this time our government is not banning flavours, but it doesn't mean we can't or that we won't in the future. Bill 19 includes provisions to address flavours in the future if we need to do more to address youth vaping. This provision gives our government, any government, the ability to act quickly to address the role of flavours in attracting youth to vaping products if needed in the future.

It's time Alberta had the legislation it needs to keep tobacco and vaping products out of the hands of youth and the authority to enforce it. Bill 19 sends a strong message to youth and anyone who thinks it's okay to supply them with vaping products. The ultimate price that our youth will pay for vaping is yet unknown, but that's not a reason to wait and see. We know that these products are dangerous. We know that this is a looming public health crisis, especially for young Albertans. Bill 19 is the first legislation in Alberta to address vaping, and it's long, long overdue. It's a health priority for Albertans, and it's a priority for this government. We all have a responsibility to get these products away from those who should never have them, our children.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 19, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, with 20 minutes.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise in this House and speak to this very important piece of

legislation. Actually, a little story. When we were connecting with youth throughout the review, I remember the youth saying that they trusted government and that if these products were so bad, then why would the government allow access and use of these products? So I think passing this bill will be a very clear statement to youth and to Albertans that this is a product that is not safe for them and that there are harms associated with it. Anyway, very, very happy to be able to stand here today in support of Bill 19.

Mr. Speaker, I've actually never smoked a day in my life. I never smoked anything ever in my life. I think the reason for that was that when I was in school, whether it was elementary or junior high and again in high school, we heard repetitively about the addictive nature of tobacco products, and we were warned about the serious health impacts that these products will have if consumed. I think I can say with confidence, probably for yourself and others, that if not personally impacted by the use of tobacco products, every member in this Chamber likely knows somebody who has been impacted, tragically impacted, by the use of these products. It is well documented that the use of tobacco products will have serious health consequences for individuals that use them. In fact, these products can have serious health consequences for individuals that are exposed to the second-hand use of these products.

It's estimated that about 50 per cent of the people that use tobacco products will eventually die from their use. Tobacco use costs society significantly and, unfortunately, continues to cost us. The human cost is obvious, and it's devastating.

There has also been the cost on our health system, and it is expected to cost the Alberta taxpayer, as we just heard from the Minister of Health, \$6 billion over the next four years. This is why it was so devastating to hear that after five years of steady decline in the number of Albertans who use tobacco products in this province – after five years of decline – we saw a spike in the number of people using tobacco. At 18.9 per cent we far exceed the national average in regard to tobacco use, and we have much, much work to do.

7:40

In 2011 and 2012 Minister Fred Horne, the then Minister of Health, and associate minister Dave Rodney led the government in building a strategy for a tobacco-free future, and I believe that that continues to be our goal. As a strategy to save lives, they had put a large focus on prevention, specifically strategies to reduce tobacco use amongst young people. The good news was: it was working. Tobacco use was declining in our province. All statistics, all demographics showed a decline in use. This was reinforced by a decline in the overall sales of tobacco products in this province. It was good news. It was great news.

What was not envisioned in this report back in 2011-2012 was vaping. Since the strategy was put into place, vaping has emerged in a very major way. Its use is especially prevalent amongst young people in our province. This product was heavily marketed at convenience stores, online, and through other channels, using flavours like rainbow unicorn and cotton candy; display cases placed next to slurpy machines and packaging that looked similar to what you'd find on a candy wrapper. So it's not surprising, then, that over the past four years we've seen year-over-year increases in the use of vaping products by youth. Sold as a safe alternative to smoking, we discovered that many youth were engaging in this activity because they just simply weren't aware of the harm related to inhaling a foreign substance nor the significant risk of inhaling large amounts of nicotine.

Anecdotally, we visited with a number of educators and school resource officers, and we heard in many high schools, one in particular, that about 80 per cent of the youth in that high school

were engaging in vaping activities. Two Edmonton resource officers that we met with literally poured out two massive boxes of vaping products that had been confiscated from youth in their school, that they had collected from two high schools over a period of less than two months.

When meeting with youth, they echoed the concerns that we were hearing from other stakeholders. The youth we met with expressed significant concern for the number of youth within their circles that were engaging in vaping activities. We heard stories of how nicotine-addicted youth were now resorting to combustible cigarettes in order to meet their cravings. We saw that in the evidence presented to us from the academics that showed a clear connection between vaping amongst young people and increases in tobacco use. There's a direct correlation between the two.

All that progress that we had made in reducing tobacco in this province reversed as we saw the number of tobacco users increase to 2010 levels in a mere two years. It became very clear that we needed action. We needed to put mechanisms in place to not only protect youth, to limit access, to ensure enforcement of current laws, but also to send a clear message to Albertans that there is risk and harm associated with the use of vaping products.

Under Bill 19 minors will not be permitted to consume or possess vaping products. Sales to minors will be prohibited. There will be photo ID requirements for the purchase of vaping products. Display and advertising and the promotion of vaping products will be restricted. There will be restrictions on where vaping products can be sold. Smoke- and vape-free areas will be expanded in order to limit the exposure that young people have and the normalization of these products. There will also be fines associated with any violation of these above points.

I need to also emphasize that there's balance found in this bill. This bill works to address the harms of vaping but also protects adults' rights to choose for themselves and considers as well the interests of businesses within our communities. It is worth acknowledging that all stakeholders, including vape retailers and convenience stores, that we met with and consulted in this process supported that idea, supported the idea of protecting youth from the harms of vaping, and they provided excellent feedback on how we could do just that. Many vaping retailers had already been putting measures in place to limit youth access and help to reduce the prevalence of vaping amongst young people, including educating parents who were coming into their vaping retailers to purchase products for their youth. Many retailers we met with actually requested that government take measures that would give them the tools to assist in reducing youth access to vaping. I believe this bill takes a large step in protecting youth from the harms of vaping and tobacco products while protecting the rights of adults to choose.

I'll close with this. This legislation in and of itself is only part of the solution. Limiting youth access, implementing enforcement practices, and the other measures we've taken will bring us a long way in reducing the use of these products, but education, raising awareness of the health impacts, providing supports for individuals struggling with addiction, continuing efforts to help those who are currently experiencing the powerful impact of nicotine addiction to receive the help that they will need will be crucial next steps. I heard stories of youth who innocently enough started using vaping products, not knowing of the harms, and are now living with a serious nicotine addiction. We will need to be ready to address this as a community.

This bill is going to save lives, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to support it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to join debate on this bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening and speak to Bill 19, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. I appreciate the minister bringing it forward as well as the members who participated in the discussions through the consultations on this legislation. Of course, the goal of reducing youth vaping and youth smoking is not by any means a partisan issue, and I think that there are many pieces of this legislation that I do see myself supporting and thinking it is the right direction overall. Of course, the legislation largely, as was mentioned, brings vaping regulations in line with current tobacco legislation in our province, and, once again, we have no issues with that.

However, through the opportunities I've had to read through the bill – which has been relatively short, so I apologize if I make any mistakes in my initial reading of it – there are some questions that I have and some decisions that were made by the minister and by the members who were on the panel for this, decisions that I have questions about and I imagine other members of the opposition caucus will have as well.

The first one being that the B.C. government went through similar discussions and decisions about restrictions on sales of flavoured vaping products, not only to youth but just the idea of flavoured vaping products across the board, and they made some decisions that were different than what the UCP government has decided to do moving forward. So I have some questions about that in terms of ensuring that we are taking every measure possible to reduce exposure to young Albertans.

Of course, we know that flavouring is a way of attracting young users. We saw that with tobacco, and that's why when the NDP was in government our Health minister and all of us were poised to ensure that the sale of flavoured tobacco would be eliminated in our province, understanding, once again, that any opportunity to market these products to youth is a concern for us as parents and family members and taxpayers as well with the cost that that has on the health care system, as the last member spoke of briefly.

Now, the previous member, actually several of them, also mentioned the startling statistic that teen rate of use within the last 30 days was only 8 per cent in 2014-15, it went up to 22 per cent in 2016-2017, and that grew to 30 per cent in 2018-2019. We obviously see that there are great concerns with what the future might hold for users of vaping products. We do our best as legislators and regulators to ensure that we are trying to bring this number down, as we did over the last four years, and, of course, this is an important step on that as well, but we just have to ensure that we are doing everything we can while this legislation is before us to ensure that that is actually happening.

Some of the questions that I personally have are – and some of these may arguably be under the purview of the federal government, and I can appreciate that, but I think it's something that as members of the provincial government we should be concerned about as well. Some of the stories that I've heard over the years, I suppose anecdotally, Mr. Speaker, are concerns with the quality of mechanisms, the quality of the vaping mechanism itself. The mechanics of what people are vaping out of is a concern. We've seen that improper use of that, whether it was sold improperly in terms of different voltages of batteries for the rig, as they call it, that it's used in – we've seen instances of these products exploding in people's faces, so that's a concern for me, not only looking at the long-term effects of these vaping products on our population but also the short-term effects.

7:50

We need to ensure, if these products are being sold to people in our communities, that they are safe to use, that the people that are selling them are qualified to sell those products and that they have the knowledge and education to make sure that they're not selling improper balances of these products. That's a major concern. I would be interested to hear, either from the Health minister or the minister that was involved in these conversations, if that issue ever came up and potentially why that isn't included in this or if there are plans to have further discussion with the federal government on if that's all that they can do.

Another piece that maybe the Health minister did touch on is just in terms of proximity to schools and child care facilities and other facilities with large populations of youth seeing these products sold. This has actually been an issue that has been brought to my attention within my own constituency, the proximity of one of these shops to an elementary school. A constituent brought up the fact that these children are walking outside the school every day, and they're seeing advertisements, potentially, or at least the storefront of this. In a lot of cases the storefronts are almost fully covered, but there are still opportunities for these children to see these stores and say: hey, what's going on in there?

While, once again, there are pieces within this legislation to ensure that youth are not being sold these products, there are still opportunities for the promotion of these products in our community. I appreciate that there is some movement on that within this legislation as well, but I do have concerns about the proximity to schools and daycares and, once again, other areas with large populations of youth.

Now, another issue that I think will come up a lot in this discussion is the decision by the government to not restrict sales of flavoured vaping products to age-restricted stores. We see in many cases that there are stores specifically for vaping and the sale of vaping products; on the other hand, we see gas stations and other stores able to sell these products as well. How did the UCP come to the conclusion that it should not be restricted to only these age-restricted stores? That's an important issue that I would be interested in hearing from the government on.

Another question that has come up and, once again, has also been raised by many of my constituents is just the idea of limiting the concentration of nicotine in vaping products. We can see that it goes through many levels, varying from whatever milligrams it might be up scales of, you know, five different levels of nicotine flavouring. I'm just wondering, once again, why this government decided to not restrict that. I believe that in other provinces – once again, in B.C. we saw that they made the decision to limit that. So why did the UCP decide to not in fact move forward on that?

We see that the government has had many opportunities to speak with large companies, lobbyists in the big tobacco and, I suppose, the big vaping, as we may call it, industries. We know that those companies have had their voices heard. I'm just hoping to find out maybe a bit more from the member about the consultations that went into this in terms of nonprofit organizations within our province that are working to ensure that youth aren't being promoted these products and trying to ensure that the rate of use by youth is as low as it can be in these circumstances. As well, just with regular families across the province: what conversations have we had with them? Can you give us the actual numbers about how many people were consulted, maybe some general idea of what their opinions were on the issue? It is an important issue, and everyone will have a different opinion on this.

As I mentioned earlier, I have a few of these vape stores in my constituency, and I've had the opportunity to have these

conversations with them. As you might imagine, they were concerned about this legislation, and many of them actually had postcards that they were sending to the member as well as the minister involved in this panel, wanting to ensure that their voices were heard. Of course, small businesses in our community are important voices, but we also have to make sure that we're finding the right balance, ensuring that we're listening to other people that are not necessarily vapers and people that are concerned about this issue just as much. Whether it be the proximity, once again, the level of nicotine in these products, whatever it might be, they're all very important issues that we should be discussing before making any movement on this issue.

Once again, just going back to the actual regulation of these products, I mentioned the concerns around modifications that we often see sold in stores but also the idea of additives, the products that are being added to not only the base of whatever it might be: nicotine, in many cases glycol, I believe, is also in there, and whatever else might be in there. But we've seen instances across North America, across the world where, once again, there are health hazards because of the industry not being regulated enough. I don't want to get this wrong, but I believe there were vitamin D additives in these products that were being actually promoted as natural health products because of the additives they were putting in, but they were actually further harming people that were using these products. They were getting – I can't remember what the actual name of the health issue was, but popcorn lung is something that I've heard through the debates of this.

So, once again, ensuring that while we are moving forward to reduce these concerns and strengthen the regulations on these issues, I guess, overall, why we're not taking an approach into further research of the hazards of these products – because you can go into these stores, and very little research, as far as I can tell, has been done, and not a lot has been proven, whether it's healthier or more hazardous to people's health compared to regular cigarettes. But you will often find – you know, hopefully you don't find it, but you will sometimes find, I suppose, that they are promoted as a healthier alternative or a cessation to actually quit cigarettes.

I have personally seen people that were able to quit smoking cigarettes with this product and further were able to stop vaping after they quit smoking. They were totally able to eliminate this habit because over time they were able to lower their nicotine. But on the other hand, once again, there are concerns that we've just added a new layer of hazards, that people will be smoking cigarettes and vaping at the same time.

You know, to think about the double-negative effects of these products, especially on the health of children in our province, is very concerning. So, yes, I definitely have questions, and maybe not specifically on the idea of reducing the use for youth overall and in terms of my line of questioning, but I think they are important questions that need to be answered. And if we can't do it as a provincial government, then these issues most definitely need to be brought to the federal government. I would appreciate either the minister or the member who sat on this panel maybe being able to speak to some of those issues and why they weren't or maybe were discussed in those consultations.

Once again, overall I think this is a move in the right direction. I think that we need to continue looking at this issue not only for youth but for the health of the province overall, and I think that there's some important movement in this legislation, things that I can support. I don't think this is a partisan issue, by any means.

You know, as I said, there are people on both sides of this issue. By no means do I think that we should move to necessarily the idea of prohibition because then, as we've seen in other areas, we have bigger concerns about even less regulation. So it's something that

we have to take seriously, that we shouldn't just shut the door on, you know, without having these discussions. I think there are opportunities as I've seen anecdotally for people to quit smoking with these products, but there're also hazards, hazards of increased use of nicotine intake. So that's very concerning.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I will have more to say if we have more time to discuss this, but once again I think that we should continue talking about the proximity to schools. It was a very important issue for constituents in my community. I think we should continue to talk about the concentration of these products, because of course you can buy it at zero per cent, but you can also get it at 12 per cent or 20 per cent depending on what kind of vape juice you are using. You can quickly find, if you are a constant vaper, as many people are, that you will end up intaking more nicotine than you would have been from smoking cigarettes. So, once again, that's a concern to me.

8:00

There's no doubt that there has been over the last several years a cult following to the idea of vaping. You see lots of kids who think it's very cool for whatever reason to be using this product. We have to ensure that these youth and their families and everyone across the province understand the inherent risks of using these products, even more so when we talk about the nicotine additive. Either way, we don't know the health risks at this point, and I think that more research needs to be put into it.

More recently I know that the federal government had made movement on the labelling of these products. You know, I've heard mixed feelings about that from the locations of these shops that I've had the opportunity to visit. In some instances it's silly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has risen.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for, I think, a very thoughtful debate and discussion. Really appreciate that. A lot of questions there, and I'm hoping we're going to get more time to talk about that and be able to unpack some of those questions.

But to address what I can, you know, first of all, we did meet with big companies. We met with small companies. We met with C stores and co-ops. We did receive a large number of the postcards that were mentioned by the member. Those postcards were actually sent in by individuals who use vaping products to communicate, you know, that they had been smokers, often for 25, 30, 35 years, and there were little testimonials talking about how vaping products had impacted them and their ability to move away from tobacco products.

Actually, interesting, too, is that we met with a lot of vaping retailers, found that they were often very mission-driven themselves and that they had been using cigarettes for a long time and that vaping products helped them move – I think the evidence is really unclear at this point. We saw some evidence that supported the idea of using vaping products as a cessation tool. Not a lot. There was also evidence, though, on using vaping products as a harm-reduction tool. There's evidence there.

The member is absolutely correct. There's significant evidence and, as I said in my speech, there's a definite correlation between increases in vaping and increases in tobacco use, especially for young people. Again, once you become nicotine addicted, you need to get that hit, and the combustible cigarette is still the best way to be able to get it. So there's definitely a correlation. Reducing the access to vaping will hopefully help reduce tobacco use, the eventual tobacco use that comes with that.

We met with stakeholders right across the board, hundreds of stakeholders, not just businesses. We met with health advocates, specialists, lung specialists, doctors. We met with and discussed with the AMA. We met with educators. We met with enforcement, resource officers. We met with youth. We actually met with the Education minister's council. They kindly pointed out that we should also connect with kids that actually vape. They all were touched by vaping and knew other kids in their circles that were vaping. We connected with a lot of youth to hear their perspective. Of course, we connected with parents. And on top of all of that, we had our survey out in the field, and we heard from almost 10,000 members of our community. Heavy engagement in that survey. So we received an immense amount of feedback.

I want to point out that what's in this bill was largely supported by every stakeholder that we met with. There was a lot of alignment in regard to what we need to do to move forward to protect youth from the harms.

Talking about flavours, there's a recommendation – and it's in the bill – to push flavours to regulations so that we can address that at some point in the future if deemed it needs to be. The evidence on this is coming in.

So talking about further research, there's constant research that's being done on this. We met with a lot of academics in this process. We learned more and more every day throughout the entire review. There was a new news story article and research project that was coming out and saying something. So we did our best to sort through what was coming in. But there's full recognition from me that this is a moving target, and I think that was again part of where we could put some things in regulations and allow the government to be able to adjust.

There's also overlap in jurisdiction as well with the federal government. We did communicate with the federal government. I think there are challenges when you're talking about a country with one province restricting certain products and products that jump borders or online sales. I do believe there needs to be a national strategy in regard to addressing this concern. Certainly, we communicated that to our federal counterparts.

The component on flavours. This is what I meant by we're protecting adults' right to choose, and those postcards helped prove that. Again, thousands of these postcards came in, and they indicated that the flavours were important to them and important to their ability to get off combustible cigarettes. I'm totally supportive of the federal government's naming convention and getting away from things like rainbow unicorn, which was obviously geared towards young people, you know, whether you call it cherry or something like that. But adults did cite flavour as critical in regard to their use of the product. At this point there's not enough evidence to say that these products are not worse for you than cigarettes.

I'm looking forward to answering more questions.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this evening having a chance to rise to speak to Bill 19, Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. Like the Member for Calgary-Klein, I too also, you know, never smoked a day in my life, and in a way I kind of feel a little bit ill-equipped here to be able to speak to this this evening. Nonetheless, I think what we have here in principle is a bill that we can find some support for. I think there are possibly some components of it that probably could have been strengthened a little bit more, maybe some consideration of adding some of these things.

You know, I think back to when there was a movement to sort of, I guess, hide the sales of cigarettes behind screens within convenience stores, things like that. During that time my daughter actually participated in that endeavour to have that done in an effort to try to reduce the appeal for youth to start smoking. Here we are looking at a new component. As a matter of fact, I even had a text from her just a short little while ago in regard to it.

I should take a moment and thank the Minister of Health for bringing the bill forward for debate within this House. You know, when we look at the costs of smoking and what that puts on our health care system, I think there's an opportunity to make some changes so that we can help Albertans be healthier, save them some tax dollars, and at the same time be able to then reinvest those dollars into other programs.

For the most part, although I've only had a very, very short time with this bill and have not been able to really dig into it and look at what it's doing, on essentially first blush it seems to largely line up with the tobacco legislation that we currently have. You know, certainly I don't think there are any concerns around that. If anything, I think that by lining up with that current legislation, it'll be a little bit easier to manage going forward because we already have a lot of experience with that legislation and how it works and things like that. Duplicating that, I think, with the vaping products will make it a lot easier to manage.

8:10

I did manage to mention, of course, that I think there were a couple of areas that perhaps we could have looked at a little bit further, and I know my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday went into some depth already about that, I guess, to look around the amount of nicotine that's contained within that. As we all know, nicotine is very, very addictive, and that is what promotes people to smoke and potentially risk their health and the health of others with that. I know the Member for Calgary-Klein touched on that a little bit, and I'm sure that once when we get into Committee of the Whole, we'll have an opportunity to maybe dig into that a little bit more with a little bit freer section of the debate.

The other one was, of course, around some of the flavourings that were involved. Again, the Member for Calgary-Klein kind of touched on some of those things a little bit, but I would love the opportunity, maybe in Committee of the Whole, to dig into that a little bit more. We do see some restrictions with regard to flavours within the cigarette part of things, so possibly lining up with those pieces of legislation as well would just make it a little bit easier, maybe, going forward in terms of managing this because everything would be going in one simple direction.

Again, having not a lot of experience and not a lot of knowledge about this, I guess I'm trying to be somewhat fair, as much as I can. I know that in the new building where I moved my constituency office to, a new business owner a short while ago moved in there, and it is a vaping business. Through our talks just from time to time, he did know about potential legislation that may be coming forward around vaping and how the consultations with small businesses like himself would be done.

I do realize that you just can't invite absolutely everyone to the table. It's not possible. You know, we'd need probably a stadium to hold that kind of a meeting, and that just probably wouldn't be very productive. Again, I know the Member for Calgary-Klein already had a few comments in and around that. I guess any information that came out of those consultations might be helpful as MLAs to have because at some point in time I'm sure somebody's going to be calling me up, sending me an e-mail, walking into my office, asking me to explain what we're going to be doing with this piece of legislation, Bill 19. It would be really helpful to be able to talk about those kinds of things,

what was learned through those consultations, so that I'm able to communicate that. You know, it's possible, I suppose, that at the end of the day they might not agree with me on that, but at least I have that at my fingertips to be able to look at.

Like my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday, I have questions around the flavoured vaping products. Hopefully, we'll get a chance to maybe dig into that a little bit more, around some of the concentrations of nicotine present within that as well as maybe even some of the other products that are contained in there. When I very first learned about artificial sweeteners, Mr. Speaker, and some of the chemicals that are contained in there – I have to be honest – I kind of took a pause, and went: well, maybe I'll just stick to regular sugar here. As you can tell probably, that's exactly what I've done. But, you know, at the very least we'll have these conversations so that as MLAs we're able to go back to our constituents, to our small businesses, to our large businesses and are able to have those discussions with those folks as to why we took these directions, why we didn't take directions, things such as that.

Also, it would be again helpful, around any kind of information that came out of the consultations, to be able to share that with MLAs. You know, I guess at the very least, as the Member for Calgary-Klein mentioned meetings with the very large stakeholders and whatnot, I think it would be helpful having information so that the smaller businesses don't get the impression that the direction was solely driven by the mass of big corporations. There won't be, I guess, that black cloud or something hanging over that in terms of, "Well, they influence the decision" and all those normal things that you hear in the course of how you did or didn't do your consultations.

The Member for Edmonton-West Henday talked about the school areas, and of course Edmonton-Decore is home to 26 different schools, and right in the middle of the riding, 144th Avenue, there are so many schools. You can go through my entire riding, and I believe there are two spots where you can go faster than 30 kilometres an hour. There are a lot of schools in that area. All of the regulations around that in terms of the vaping products and whatnot and how that can affect the schools are also very, very helpful information going forward.

I think that at this time that's all I really have to offer. I'd be grateful for any kind of information that I can gain as we move this through the various stages of debate, and if anybody reaches out to me for my thoughts on what we're doing or if I need to reach out to stakeholders to get their feedback as we're moving through the debate process, that would be very, very helpful.

I look forward to others' comments this evening on Bill 19. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has risen with a question or a comment.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noted from the member that this will probably be a very constructive conversation during Committee of the Whole, so I won't keep popping up every time, but I do look forward to that conversation.

A couple of real quick things to answer the member's question there. The report has been posted online, so you can review the report as well as the meetings that took place with any big company. All the notes from those meetings have been posted online as well, so you can see that. I was a homeless-shelter manager, so I hope the member can have faith that I was certainly looking out for the little guy, as I have my entire life and will never stop doing. So that's to answer that question.

A little about the proximity question. I think one of the challenges here is that, again, you're talking about a product where evidence has not shown that that product is any more dangerous than tobacco smoke. Cigarette sales have long been available in C stores, which are often in close proximity to schools. So to come in and restrict that, the one product and not the other, I think would have been problematic. But the big point of this bill is the reduction in the visibility in regard to the advertising, so taking that out of clear view of young people has been, I think, a big part of what we're trying to do here, to respond to that question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available, with about three and a half minutes. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just quickly on the point that was just made in terms of ensuring that there's no visibility, the fact is, you know, that I still personally have concerns and my constituents have concerns that there are locations of schools where, right across the schoolyard, there are big signs that say – this is made up, obviously – Jim's Vape Store. That's a little different than if these products are hidden, which has been done through this legislation, as far as I can tell, behind a convenience store's counters. The elimination of promotional material in those gas stations or convenience stores: that's wonderful. But the fact is that there are still these opportunities where kids could be looking out their grade 2 window and see Jim's Vaping across the street. That's still a concern that I hope we can maybe address a bit further.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a), with two-ish minutes.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak on Bill 19, Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. I'd like to thank the government for bringing this forward. I think some of my colleagues have spoken quite a bit at length here about some of our concerns with how this bill doesn't necessarily cover all the ground we would like it to do, but I think that fundamentally we agree that on the issue of youth vaping and youth smoking and, particularly, youth nicotine use, it is a concern that we should be addressing. I believe the majority of if not all Albertans agree with that goal.

8:20

I understand that this legislation largely brings the vaping regulations in line with our current tobacco legislation. I think that's good, but certainly I and my colleagues have expressed already that more could be done. My colleague from Edmonton-West Henday here just spoke about how, for example, even if you reduce the visibility in stores, there are still some placements of placarding and whatnot in public that can be very visible and can be used specifically to target youth and target young people to attract them. We know that when we look at these types of products and these types of stores, they use techniques and advertising methodology involved in their stores, including things like clever slogans and names, bright colours, and things that are designed psychologically to get you to draw your eyes to them and to be more interested, right?

I think that, really, the government should do more in terms of trying to understand how we have other levers that we can pull to

reduce that consumption. We do know that young people are susceptible to some of these practices. And, actually, not just young people. Every person is susceptible to these tools and techniques. Not to say that the government isn't taking action; it's just that I think there is more action that can be done.

I think it is important that we recognize that this will help reduce some of the exposure of young Albertans. I mean, our government took similar action when we first came into government, and we banned the use of flavoured tobacco products, things like flavoured cigars, cigarillos, cigarettes. I think that is comparable to what is being done right now. I mean, at the time, when we were in government last term here, there was less focus on the vaping products, and they weren't quite as prevalent.

I believe I have a number here that the consumption of vapes or the usage of vapes in youth has grown from that time, in 2015. At the time it was about 8 per cent, and now it's about 30 per cent, more than tripling its use, right? The prevalence of these vape products has increased significantly in a very short amount of time, and that is largely due to some of the targeted advertising and the targeted promotion of this product and the popularity of some of the different flavourings. I think that it's going to be good to be able to see that those are restricted and that it's going to be reduced as well.

I think it's also interesting that I and a number of my colleagues have been hearing about how the concentration limits in nicotine are a concern. I think that certainly we should be trying to keep those as low as possible. Certainly, in the old world, I guess, before this legislation was introduced, when there were no limits, we could see some very high concentrations of nicotine, that far exceeded what you would consume even by smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. I think that was particularly concerning.

I'm pleased that there has been some reduction in the cap. I believe here it's 50 milligrams per millilitre that is proposed, but I would like to see that a bit lower. It is much easier for people to consume the vape product than it is to smoke a cigarette in many cases, and it can be consumed at a much higher rate as well. There are concerns there. I would like to see it reduced a bit more, perhaps to what the B.C. government has set, a limit of 20 milligrams per millilitre. That would be, I think, reasonable. It brings us more in line with other jurisdictions, and it would allow us to have – without eliminating some of those harm-reduction effects, where people can go in and use it as an alternative to cigarettes or cigarillos or whatever it is, I think that there are still those benefits. Right?

We have to understand that as a transition method for people to get off smoking and to cease their smoking, this is valuable. I know many of my friends have used it as a successful tool in the past to move away from traditional tobacco products. I think that that's something that is valuable and that I think, from a public health perspective, we should be encouraging. If there is a relatively safe alternative to traditional tobacco products like cigarettes, we should be trying to encourage that use, but we should also be making sure that those aren't targeted at our children, at minors, at youth.

I think that there's a balance that needs to be struck there, the accessibility for it to be used as an actual treatment device, as an actual transition tool, and I think that's quite important. I think the government understands that, which is why these changes are being brought in in the way they are. I think that there are certain measures that have been brought in that have been thought through. I suspect that in Committee of the Whole we'll have the opportunity to discuss some of the finer details of that, and I look forward to that. I know that the members that were on the actual task force committee have spoken at some length today already, and I'm pleased to see that as well. I'm pleased that we're able to work co-operatively here and understand the importance of this legislation and that it's actually something that I've been hearing from many

stakeholders in my area as well. I mean, it's certainly something that I'm happy to speak on here tonight.

On top of that, certainly, aligning with tobacco restrictions on things like usage in public areas is generally positive. I think that that is generally positive in the sense that we obviously know there can be second-hand effects in terms of vaping. A lot of that research is still forthcoming, and I think the members spoke to that as well, that it is not fully researched at this time and that we're still seeing and learning a lot of these effects and learning about what those changes will be. But taking a fairly conservative approach I think is reasonable because we're talking about health and safety. Potentially, in some cases, when you're talking about sports fields, playing fields, public pools, whatever it is, we're talking about the health and safety of our children. Even in these areas where children aren't congregating, we're still talking about the health and safety of our neighbours. I think that's something that we need to be measured on and need to be reasonable about, so it's certainly good to hear that there are these measures being brought in.

It's good to hear that there are going to be some increased restrictions. I think that it's good to see that this follows some of the restrictions we brought in on tobacco just a few years ago. In 2015, I believe it was, we brought in those restrictions on tobacco as well as for the flavourings. I think that's going to be positive overall. I think it's going to, overall, improve our attempts to mitigate the use of things like nicotine products. Of course, we know that right now it is age restricted – you can't sell a nicotine product to a minor – but that these could be gateways to that, right? There could be people who start with a flavoured product that includes nicotine and then move on as they age or if they're able to obtain it illicitly. Certainly, I think those are, overall, positive changes.

I mean, certainly, as we move forward with this legislation, I hope we'll be able to discuss, possibly, some changes to some of the finer details. I hope that we'll perhaps be able to have a longer discussion around what specific consultations were done in terms of those limits. While there is, I think, room for debate on where we should put those, it depends on how conservative you want to be or on what stakeholders are saying.

I understand that the report is posted. I think all members will have the opportunity to review that before we get to committee. Certainly, as we have those finer discussions, we're going to be able to talk about some of the restrictions that I think will help even further, right? I think that, as the Member for Calgary-Klein has spoken to at some length tonight, there is a really important urgency in terms of having these restrictions put in so that we can see fewer youth using these vape products and transitioning to other potential nicotine-based products in the future. I think that's very important. I'm hoping we'll have the opportunity to discuss why he feels or why his task force felt at the time that some of these changes weren't required.

I think that when we talk to different stakeholders – I know that some stakeholders that have approached me here in the city of Edmonton have expressed to me that they think stricter limits on things like nicotine concentrations would be important. I think that they've expressed that those will be scarier for children, as it were, because they won't really understand the difference between the amount of nicotine you get from a cigarette versus from several pulls of a vape. And as the vape product doesn't have the same burning sensation, in some cases, as you would get from a cigarette, it can be much easier for younger people to consume large amounts of this nicotine, particularly where the concentrations can vary wildly from product to product. I think those are things that we have to consider very carefully. It's important that we understand who was consulted on that, that we understand which health experts

were brought in, that we understand what different perspectives were used and understood. Those are all things we're going to have the opportunity to debate a bit more as we move through the stages of this bill, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased, overall, though, that we are taking some action, because some action, of course, is better than no action, right? Of course, we are going to be able to mitigate some of these effects, we are going to be able to mitigate some of this consumption, we are going to be able to mitigate some of the sales, and I think that is, overall, a very positive impact. I think that, overall, it's something I would agree with, that I think many of my colleagues here in the opposition would agree with, and that I think many Albertans would agree with.

8:30

Overall, as we learn more and more and as the knowledge that the world really has about how these vape products affect not only youth but every single person, as we understand more and more how these vape products work and, as we saw in the last few years here, how they can have serious adverse effects for people in relatively short amounts of time, I think we're going to have a better and better understanding of some of these things.

As we move forward, we should be as conservative as possible in terms of the safety record of these products because it's going to be important. People who start to consume early: we know they're likely to consume for a long time, right? They're going to consume for many, many more years into their lives, and that's something we want to make sure we can manage. We can have a reasoned discussion around the impacts for our health care system, the impacts of how we can try to mitigate increased stress on our health care system, of how we can mitigate increased strain on our public services. Consuming nicotine products and tobacco products can cause high complications at all stages of life, and it will have impacts, and I think almost every person in this place, if not every person, knows and has seen some of those impacts.

I know that we should be fighting on this. We should be fighting to make sure that we can have the healthiest and safest process, because it's something that, I think, is going to be important in terms of a harm prevention standpoint, right? When we talk about the costs of our health care system and the growing costs of our health care, this is actually a way to get in front of that. This is actually a way we can reduce the strain on our health system. We can reduce things like the growing costs because we can reduce the future impacts and the future users of our health care system. That's actually from a harm-reduction standpoint going to help on all ends, right? It's not only going to help from a public safety perspective, from a health care perspective, but it really does actually help our books as well, so, I mean, economically it just makes sense, right? It makes sense that we manage the situation. It makes sense that we try to guide it through with a steady hand while understanding the potential benefits of these vape products, because there are prevention benefits, and I don't want to discredit that.

Again, like I've been saying, many people I know have successfully used vape products to transition away from traditional tobacco products and in some cases have actually stopped consuming nicotine altogether through the use of vape products. I think that's very positive, right? We want to continue and encourage that use. We want to encourage people to have alternatives, healthier alternatives, to traditional tobacco, traditional nicotine.

I know in many cases things like the patches or the gums or whatever it is that you can chew aren't as effective because they don't have the sensation of the physical inhalation as well. So when we talk about these sorts of products, we have to understand that

there's no one-size-fits-all solution for cessation of tobacco use, right? There is no one magic silver bullet for this, for cessation of tobacco use, and that it will take many different types of products to help reduce the amount of tobacco consumption we have in our province and indeed across all Canadians.

I think that we have the opportunity here to push some of that forward, not all of it. I mean, obviously, my colleagues and I have spoken to it already today. I think that there is more we can be doing. There is more that we can advocate for. There's more that we, hopefully, will be able to have a longer discussion on, because limits on things like nicotine concentration are going to be so critical – right? – because limits on nicotine concentration will have long-term effects in terms of how severely somebody can become addicted to nicotine, how long that cessation program may take them. Or if someone is in the process of trying to cease their nicotine consumption and their tobacco consumption, with limits on it – perhaps they were smoking a pack a day before, and they switched from cigarettes to vape products, with the amount of nicotine in them – if they don't realize that different products will have different amounts, it can actually have adverse effects if they're increasing their consumption of nicotine while reducing their consumption of cigarettes.

I hope that we'll be able to consider some more of these issues, but I look forward to our time in debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any takers for 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any hon. members looking to speak to the bill proper? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise tonight and contribute to the debate at second reading of Bill 19, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. It's an important bill, perhaps not the – these aren't the bills, I suppose, that generally get the most attention. They certainly don't tend to necessarily spark the most vigorous debate. Certainly, that may perhaps be a relief given the level of, shall we say, excitement that we've had in the House over a number of issues over the last little while. So perhaps it's nice to every once in a while have a generally sedate piece of legislation on which we more or less agree. That aside, that does not in any way negate the importance of this legislation.

Now, we have become increasingly aware of the issues that surround vaping. Certainly, this was a newer technology not too long ago, seemed to have strong appeal as a replacement for tobacco. The more we learned about it, of course, the more concerns we are aware of. That tends to be how technology runs for most of us in the human race: we bring things in, we try them out, they seem neat at first, and we start to discover there are other issues. So we're moving to a point now where, indeed, most jurisdictions across Canada had moved forward with regulation, and now Alberta is joining as well.

It is important because just at the beginning of this year we did see Alberta's first case of severe vaping-related lung illness. A gentleman came forward in the winter, and in January it was revealed that when he went forward, he was not feeling well and went to see his doctor. He had coughing, shortness of breath, needed to be admitted to hospital for treatment, and indeed he was diagnosed. That was when we did hear from Dr. Deena Hinshaw – we hadn't seen her quite so much then, and perhaps not so many Albertans were as familiar with her as they are now – and she spoke at that time to sort of indicate that this was something that developed.

Now, we know that this is an issue that's been developing across Canada and indeed in the U.S. In the U.S. they've seen about just over 2,500 cases of this illness from across all 50 states. So the Public Health Agency of Canada had asked provincial health officials to report any probable or confirmed cases. We continue to learn, but we can see that indeed the use of this product can have some very serious impacts on an individual's health. We are also aware, then, that if it is impacting an individual's health, it is going to impact our health care system.

Certainly, we've had some very robust discussion about the health care system in this House and in my role as the Official Opposition critic for Health with the minister. We've certainly had a number of exchanges. But, I mean, there's one thing, I think, on which we all agree, that we would like to see health care costs reduced, and generally the most favourable way to see our health care costs reduced would be by having people be healthier and requiring less. Indeed, we know that is the most effective way to reduce costs in our health care system. If people make lifestyle changes early in life – better exercise, better food, and indeed avoiding things like smoking – they can greatly reduce their chance of chronic illness, and chronic illness is one of the biggest drivers of the growth in health care costs. So there are many, many good reasons for us to want to make sure we are properly regulating the use of vaping.

Indeed, we know from our experience in the past that we waited far too long on tobacco, and we paid extreme costs not only as a society but many individuals. I think back in my own life. I think of one of the first deaths in my extended family. My uncle Everett, when I was quite young, I think in grade 1, died of lung cancer, a heavy smoker. I think pretty much all of us probably have known somebody who has been affected by this, and taking these steps now is appropriate and prudent to try and catch this a bit earlier.

Now, I appreciate that the Member for Calgary-Klein, as part of the committee that looked into this, took the opportunity to look into this from all aspects. Indeed, there were some meetings with some of the folks that are involved with the sale of these products, and certainly we know that has been an issue in the past with tobacco. There was quite a bit of disingenuity for many, many years. Certainly, we have come a long way as a society in generally how we view corporate behaviour in that respect, but certainly there have been times when people have raised some very legitimate concerns about how companies have gone about marketing their products. Indeed, some of the members that spoke tonight have provided some perspective and some insight on that. We have seen some improvement, but it's an important conversation for us to continue.

8:40

I did take the opportunity to start to delve into some of the meeting notes here, and it's been interesting to see what some of the perspectives of folks from the industry were in relation to some of the issues that we are talking about here tonight.

Again, I think my colleagues have largely covered what this bill is doing. Largely, what we see happening is that we're bringing vaping regulations in line with tobacco legislation, which is reasonable. As others have said, you know, we are still understanding to what extent vaping is as bad or perhaps not quite as bad as the use of tobacco. Though we're still understanding the research, there is the recognition that, as I noted with the first gentleman that has a vaping-related illness here in the province of Alberta, that is the ultimate result of the use of the product. That being the case, it makes sense to me that we treat vaping like tobacco.

Now, of course, that's where the complications come in, then, from there in that there are some differences. Generally what I'm seeing is that industry is coming forward with the line of sort of saying: well, our product exists to help people quit smoking. It's not intended, at least from what I'm seeing here – generally they believe it's not intended to be a lifelong thing. It would be a cessation tool. I hope that's the case, that they are building a business model that eventually will go out of business. That said, for the time being, there are some different issues around this.

It was interesting reading the submission, at least the notes, from the meeting with the Convenience Industry Council of Canada. Now, we do recognize it's one of the things – some of my colleagues have talked about this already – how in the province of B.C., for example, they have banned flavoured vaping liquids from anywhere where youth can actually go into that store. Now, I recognize that indeed we will have an age limit in place, and there should be requirements for IDing to take place, and that is a good thing. Of course, we know that's not foolproof.

Now, of course, I was a very religious young man, Mr. Speaker, so I myself certainly at no point ever tried to circumvent any ID laws in accessing alcohol or tobacco or even entering a movie theatre. One can debate whether, you know, those benefits of that religiosity outweighed some of the other negatives. That aside, I did not find myself tempted to do so, but certainly I think we are all aware that young people do find ways to do this. So I think there is reasonable consideration in looking at whether those products should be in any place where they are allowed to go at all and whether it's better to simply remove that temptation.

I recognize that the CICC in their submission were concerned about that, their concerns being that if indeed this is a product that's intended to serve as a cessation tool, then it should be in the most convenient location. Where many people go to buy cigarettes, they should have the easy option right there to replace that with a vaping product. With that, their feeling is that then they should also have access immediately there to the flavours because that's most likely where people are going to want to go. Interesting: mango and mint are apparently the most popular. Again, I couldn't say; I haven't partaken. But it's an interesting consideration, and I certainly appreciate where industry is coming from on this. I mean, certainly, it's understandable. They want to protect their business model. To remove products that they know that people would be interested in having and from which they can earn a profit: they're not big fans of that.

I appreciate that the minister is at least giving himself the ability to develop further restrictions under regulation on this bill, and there perhaps, I think, will be great latitude and great room for further discussion on that point because, certainly, as a number of my colleagues have noted, that is generally going to be the entry level.

It's interesting reading through some of the industry views here. I've had the chance so far to read the views from the CICC and from Juul, one of the larger manufacturers. Again, they're suggesting that these flavours are the most popular and that, interestingly, tobacco flavour is the least popular. That is their suggestion. Interesting to me that folks would be very used to the flavour of tobacco but on wishing to cease, they would immediately go to a more, I guess, pleasant flavour, one might say. I have to admit that I have enjoyed a fine cigar. When I visited Cuba a few years ago, I certainly took advantage of that there. It's not something that I would do often, but I can see why some folks do appreciate the occasional smoke. That said, we'll have more opportunity, I guess, for discussion around the restriction of the sales of flavoured vaping products and how that should be approached and how we can best ensure that we

are giving as little motivation to young people as possible to want to begin this habit.

There's been some discussion so far about the concentration of nicotine in vaping products, and certainly we know that's something that some jurisdictions have chosen to move on. We know that in general there is the federal restriction. It's interesting to note. I believe the province of B.C. has chosen a limit of about 20 milligrams per millilitre whereas federally I think it's nearly triple that, from what I was reading today. That's a considerable difference. That's an area I would be interested in perhaps having some further discussion about.

I didn't hear specifically from the minister or the Member for Calgary-Klein whether that was a topic of conversation and if there was a particular reason that was chosen not to be addressed or set aside here, but perhaps in Committee of the Whole we can get a better understanding of what else might have been considered in that respect. I do appreciate what has been said by both of them in that this is an area where we have both federal and provincial jurisdiction, so we do have to be aware of how those two things interact, though at the risk of the collegial atmosphere that we've had here so far tonight, I would note that this is not a government that seems to be shy about treading on areas where it feels it needs to take power back from the federal jurisdiction. That said, that is another area where we can perhaps have some further discussion as we go forward.

It's interesting reading some of the survey results and getting a sense for where Albertans' feelings are, or at least those who participated in this survey, what their knowledge is, and what their thoughts are on how this should proceed. Obviously, according to the survey we have very strong agreement that "a person should be 18 years of age to buy vaping products." That is what we see with this legislation, and that's what people are in support of.

Similarly, a high percentage agree that folks should be required to produce photo identification. Certainly, I do note from the industry folks that were speaking up that that was their preferred method of enforcement, ensuring that, and they were suggesting that the province conduct more inspections and take more of a responsibility to ensure that folks were complying with what was existing rather than putting in blanket bans that would remove the flavoured products from the convenience stores. That's perhaps an area for further discussion and consideration, what the costs are to the province for that level of enforcement to ensure that youth are not accessing the product versus what a blanket ban would do in simply removing the temptation and the issue at all.

In general there's fairly high support amongst Albertans for restricting the advertisement or promotion of vaping products and for signage requirements making it clear that they should not be sold to minors and some support for penalties.

One issue, I would note, that didn't really seem to be touched on here and is perhaps something that will come up in further consideration in a future budget bill or something along those lines is the question of the rates at which vaping should be taxed in the province of Alberta. Now, I do note that the province of B.C. just at the end of last year, the beginning of this year did institute an additional 20 per cent tax on vaping. Now, admittedly, this is something I'm just delving into and understanding more about, but certainly that is another consideration. If indeed vaping is supposed to be a cessation tool – and that is the justification being provided for making it more available or being careful about the restriction of it – then certainly look at the relation of costs between smoking cigarettes and vaping. I would be interested to learn a bit more about whether that was a consideration that was part of the discussion on this, whether that's something that's in the future, whether that's being considered as part of the health mitigation, which is the intent

of this legislation, or whether that was considered something that would simply be a revenue tool for the government and that they would be working from that point.

Thank you for the opportunity. I look forward to further debate.

8:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to partake in questions, comments.

Seeing none, are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to be speaking on Bill 19 here this evening, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. I think there have been a lot of good comments made about this bill here in second reading. I find the debate to be constructive in the broadest possible way, which I always appreciate. I think it's important for us to perhaps look a little bit at the recent history of vaping and how it's moved through our society and how it's just changed in the way that it's being used by adults and young adults and minors as well.

One of the biggest concerns that I've followed, through the school system as minister and following the news over the last – I don't know – five, six years, is how much more prevalent the use of vaping products has been with young people, with high school students specifically. It's been quite pervasive and growing quite quickly across the province over the last few years. I just have some statistics here. In 2014 it was 8 per cent of students saying that they had used vaping products; 2016 to 2017, 22 per cent; and then upwards past 30 per cent in 2018-2019. Now, you know, with COVID in the last three months we've all become amateur enthusiasts for rates of expanding infection and so forth. We could use that same new skill that we have to see that these statistics, over the last probably eight or nine years, are quite a dramatic increase in the use of vaping products by high school kids in the province.

What I believe was initially designed as a smoking cessation technology – right? – has really evolved and especially evolved into something that young people are using recreationally and then becoming addicted to, you know, in a much different way. So we have to be really careful when we study that and pinpoint how we might be able to counteract that. I think Bill 19 does start to address this aspect of the challenge that we have here in the province, which is a lot more kids using vaping products, quite a dramatic increase over the last few years, and how we can turn that around.

Always I believe and I think the vast majority of people here in the Assembly, you know, believe that education – right? – and pervasive and insistent and consistent education around the use of vaping products amongst young people is the best way forward. And sometimes it could have the opposite reaction in the short term. You tell high school kids what not to do, and they will do the exact opposite. But if you stick with that message over time and combine it with strong regulation and expense as well, because most kids don't have that much money, then over time you will be successful. I don't have the statistics for the use of traditional tobacco products amongst the same population over the same period of time, but I would hazard a guess that it would show a, if not as dramatic, correlation of decline amongst kids using traditional tobacco products along with the incline of vaping products.

You know, we've had a long program to educate people about the use of traditional tobacco products, cigarettes in particular. It has had some degree of success. But it took a long time, it took a lot of education, and it took lots of regulation and laws as well. During my time here in this Chamber we saw quite a dramatic change in the regulation and laws around the use of tobacco

products in this province, and I would hazard to say that it had quite a positive effect over time. Not having smoking in public places like in bars and so forth: people freaked out when that law came into effect, but the province stuck with it, and you don't hear people talking about that anymore.

The sale of tobacco products in restricting it to, you know, gas stations and convenience stores, taking it out of drug stores and grocery stores and other places – cigarette machines: you don't see those anymore, right? Again, people were so insistent that this was a restriction on their rights and convenience and the state coming down on their lifestyle, and it worked out fine in the end to some degree. The banning of flavoured tobacco products early in our government's term: again, there was a backlash, but people stuck with it and understood the value of it, taking flavoured traditional tobacco products off the market for the sake of public health.

So here we are further down that path in regard to vaping, and, you know, it's good to see that we've carried on down that path. My only concern, quite frankly, is around the use of flavours. It's still fresh in my mind since – was it 2015, 2016 when we brought in the . . .

Ms Hoffman: '15.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, '15.

Ms Hoffman: First cabinet meeting.

Mr. Eggen: Right. Yes, indeed. Did we have an argument about it? Probably a little bit. But, you know, again, it became obvious and pervasive and persuasive that flavoured tobacco was definitely a way to get young people smoking from the beginning and keep them smoking over time.

So here we are with, I don't think, a dissimilar thing – right? – which is the different flavours that are added to vaping products. Again, I didn't do a big study on it, but you go to a store, you walk by, and you see advertisements. They'll have, you know, ones like candy-flavoured, bubble gum, and stuff like that. That kind of stuck out to me recently because, of course, these are direct, associative flavours with young people. Perhaps by including that in this bill at this time – I know that it's hard to do this kind of thing because we did it before. I voted, certainly, with the bar on smoking cigarettes and the selling of tobacco products and restricting them outside of supermarkets and drugstores and so forth. Like the flavour one that we did in 2015, I mean, you get a backlash, which seems overwhelming and kind of frightening. But if you stick to your guns, you end up on the right side of both history and public health, as several of my colleagues have mentioned here.

You know, the best way to spend time and energy in regard to public health is through prevention, the degree to which we can have people not using vaping products and getting addicted to nicotine at a young age. I mean, let's not mince words here. By having kids either legally or illegally using vaping products at a young age, at a high dosage level – that's what Benson & Hedges and Rothman's and these guys are doing; they're hedging their bets, saying: by legally or illegally accessing high levels of nicotine at a very young age, we'll increase the probability that these same people will become addicted and stay addicted to nicotine for the rest of their adult lives, right?

Our job here in the Legislature is to try to mitigate that and head it off at the pass, so to speak. We have an opportunity here, I think. I mean, don't get me wrong. I think this is a good bill, and I think you've done good research and you've done good stakeholder research, and, you know, I'm kind of impressed, really. But that being said, that one thing stands out in my mind that I just would like to express emphatically and perhaps persuasively – and I will

do so during the various stages of this bill – and that is to make a change to restrict the flavour aspect of vaping in order to reduce the consumption of said products by young people.

9:00

You know, for us to make it illegal for people under the age of 18 to use vaping products: I mean, that's great, but I think we all know that that's not an insurmountable wall for young people to access these products. They can always find a way, through people that are slightly older or have turned 18 or through some black-market mechanism, to get the vaping products that they want to buy. Just a statistic that I heard on the news yesterday, I guess: 30 per cent of the kids in Alberta had used vaping products in the last month. I thought: wow. I mean, that's definitely ground zero for, as I said, this beginning of introducing an individual to an addictive substance. They could carry that addiction and that affliction around with them for the rest of their adult lives.

Again, you know, you've built quite a strong platform here to deal with vaping and to deal with the public health issue around vaping. It's quite a sturdy platform. Let's add something onto it. Let's put another plank onto there that would somehow limit flavoured vaping products and nicotine in the mix.

I think the public is more concerned about health than they have been for many years, considering the COVID-19 crisis that we're all facing. You know, I think that we've learned a lot about vaping over the last couple of years, especially where it was quite a wake-up call. People said: hey, look, this can have as serious health effects as using tobacco. We've had a number of cases where, you know, people have developed chronic respiratory syndromes and cancer, as a carcinogenic product. Again, I think there's a public appetite to pursue this in an aggressive way, as we are allowed through the bill that we can build here in this Legislature, and I think that maybe it's not a bad idea to do so.

Again, you know, restricting advertising, I think, is a very good idea. Like, there was such a grey area here in regard to vaping, between its birth as a smoking-cessation tool and a recreational tool and then, of course, as something that is a way by which people can be addicted to nicotine just in a more general sense. I think that we've learned a lot over the last few years since this product was first introduced as something to consume.

I think that in other jurisdictions – again, when we are building a law here, we should always look to other jurisdictions, not just in other provinces but across North America. I know that in the United States there's been quite an aggressive wake-up call in regard to vaping and its negative health effects and the insidious way by which it can promote addiction to nicotine, with our young population especially. I think that maybe we should just take a quick peek back at some of those developments that we've seen to see that, you know, by restricting flavoured vaping products even further, we would be fulfilling the intention of this bill in a much more complete and responsible way. Right?

As always, I would temper my comments by saying that, you know, I like the foundation on which this bill has been built, and I just want to make sure that we are fulfilling the overall intent by making sure that each of the details is correct and is consistent both in a logical sort of way and on moral and public health grounds as well.

By restricting advertising and restricting the use of vaping: again, you know, that's the way by which so many people gain knowledge about what you think is acceptable or is cool or is somehow what you should be doing as a young person. You watch and model and copy adults doing the various things that they do. By restricting the use of vaping products in public places and so forth, again, we will

reduce the exposure of young eyeballs on people vaping, which is a good idea.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-North West for, I think, his thoughtful debate in the discussion, actually, so far. I hear largely concurrence that this bill is important and needs to move forward.

Of course, there are just a few things to talk about. I do appreciate the member's concern for flavours. I guess that's just to point out that it is in this bill, that we did put it in the regulations, and again emphasizing that we are dealing with a bit of a moving target.

Just to address the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, he had commented about the influence of big companies on our not banning flavours, and I want to emphasize that we actually heard from thousands of regular Albertans, people who were using vaping products, both through the survey as well as through the cards that were delivered as well as through our consultation with many stakeholders across the province, about the importance of flavours for adults. There was a lot of influence in regard to that, and I think there's still a lot for us to understand, but we do recognize the concern, and that's why we have added flavours in this bill and the ability to address this at some point in the future through regulation. I guess, to quote my friend the Minister of Transportation, take yes for an answer, and we'll continue to have this conversation, I'm sure.

The other thing I thought I'd mention, too: nicotine levels did come up. To be clear, nicotine levels were definitely something that came up at the consultations. I think you'll see it in the report. Again, I think this was something that merited a little bit further discussion, understanding, you know, some of the feedback we did hear. Of course, we did hear feedback about eliminating nicotine levels. We also heard feedback where heavy tobacco users cited the need for heavier products in regard to nicotine to help them. That was the only thing that could help them in regard to the transition.

Also, the concern with the way these devices are built: some devices have the ability to take in more, depending on how you use them. It actually had less to do with the nicotine levels in the fluid and more to do with the type of device, so it's a little more complicated than just restricting nicotine levels.

The other component, too, is that there was concern that if you reduce the nicotine levels in some of these products, you take your drag, and if you're not getting the nicotine from that, you continuously use that, so you end up using it all day long instead of periodically. There was certainly some concern expressed around that, and I think that was part of what was considered in regard to our decision on how we moved forward. Anyway, I think this is a great discussion.

Actually, one more thing, just the point about education. I think it's actually worth noting – and this isn't a dig – that I support their decision to ban flavours in 2015, but that's actually, subsequently, the same time where we started to see increases in the use of tobacco. From 2015 to 2017 we saw it go from I think 15 per cent back up to 18 per cent within two years. All that does is, I think, highlight that there needs to be a more comprehensive strategy in regard to addressing tobacco use, and I think the Member for Edmonton-North West hit the nail on the head when he started off his speech talking about education. There's only so much that you can put in legislation. We need to make sure that we're getting out, that we're dealing with the education side and raising awareness as

well as providing support for people that are currently dealing with addictions so we can continue to see reduction in the use of the product.

The other thing in this bill that I think is going to help deal with that is the enforcement side of things, too. You know, we can go legislate whatever we want, but if we're not actually enforcing this and making sure that people are complying with this, we're not going to make headway on this. I think that one of the big parts of this bill that's going to be so critical is the enforcement.

The last thing I wanted to point out. Because we're aligning a lot of what we're doing with vaping with what we did with combustible cigarettes, I want to highlight that the 2011-2012 strategy was working. We were seeing steady declines in tobacco use. So we're kind of just continuing that but making sure that we're factoring in vaping as part of our solution.

Anyway, again, thank you for the robust and thoughtful debate.

9:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Ten seconds under 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. I am glad to be able to rise tonight and speak in regard to Bill 19, Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020. This is something that we had been working on, and I'm glad to see that that work has continued and that the work has resulted in legislation by the government today. I think that this is a move in the right direction, and I want to start by saying that. I think it's definitely a step forward from where we are. I think that ensuring that the federal parameters that were put in place over the last couple of years have the thoughtful and robust local legislation to fill the gaps is a useful piece.

I think there still are a couple of gaps, and you've heard some of my colleagues say them. I may rearticulate a couple of those, but I do want to begin by giving credit, of course, to the minister, whose name gets to go on the bill, the staff in the minister's office who contributed to it as well as everyone in the department and everyone who works in public health outside of the department who has been contributing to this as well.

I know that we made some significant strides forward in partnership with the same types of stakeholders very early in 2015. It was actually our very first cabinet meeting. It was around the same time that sections of the prior bill were being proclaimed, but not all were anticipated to be proclaimed by the date set by the former government. I was very honoured to be able to add something to that very first cabinet agenda and leave there with regulations passed that banned the sale of flavoured tobacco products in Alberta. And it wasn't easy. We definitely had some push-back and we had some concerns, many of the very arguments that were articulated here today and yesterday as to why flavours weren't incorporated at this time for vaping when we did the piece around tobacco.

I do want to say that it was one of my career highlights to be recognized by Les Hagen and ASH action – Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta, essentially, I think was the former name – for moving in this direction. It was a very good day and an exciting day. Of course, all of us, I think, have probably family members and definitely close connections, whether they be family or friends, who've been impacted by cancer, and everything that we can do in this place to reduce the compounding triggers for cancer I think we should give careful consideration to and act to create conditions that make it easier for all of us to have a healthy and full life, in whatever way that might be.

Again, I want to say that I generally feel very positive about this. It's a step in the right direction. The fact that the most recent data that was released by the government shows that 30 per cent of teens that were surveyed said that they had vaped in the 30 days prior, I believe it was: that is a very large number. Before I was in this Assembly, I was on the Edmonton public school board, and one of the things that we did there was not just ban the use of vaping on school property or in school buildings but the actual possession of any vaping products, because it was definitely already starting to become a bit of a trigger. There'd be certain hallways you'd walk down and you'd smell, you know, grape vape while you'd walk through the cloud. It was students who initially approached us about that. Then, of course, a number of staff, and then, of course, a number of other organizations got onside in support of that, too.

I do have concerns that probably the biggest attractor, from when I've had conversations with young people around vaping, is the flavours, that it's fun. They can vape things that taste like candy or peaches or chocolate or bubble gum or cherries, and the list goes on. I think that with the critics who have highlighted some of their concerns with the bill, the bulk of them focus around the flavour piece. Again, I know it's not easy. I know that there are going to be corner stores, there are going to be consumers, there are going to be manufacturers, producers that say: "Well, we just can't do it. It's going to be too hard, and people are just going to keep smoking." That is certainly one of the arguments that's made. I don't know that we have evidence to back it up, or at least I didn't see any of that evidence at the time when we made the decision to ban flavoured tobacco products.

I have read the coverage where the minister says that he did not personally meet with tobacco or vaping manufacturers or lobbyists. I would like to know if anyone from his caucus did or if any of the political staff did who were involved in this. It's not that I'm accusing them of doing that. It's because I think it sends a really strong message when you don't take those meetings, when you say: "Our number one priority is going to be around ensuring that we do the right thing from a public health perspective, and we're going to fight hard to make sure that we keep that as our guiding focus. You certainly can send correspondence, but we're not going to sit down and be lobbied." I think that that's a fair thing.

It wasn't our office that initiated that. It was actually a former Conservative Health minister, Fred Horne, who started that relationship of saying that we're not going to meet with tobacco lobbyists, we're not going to meet with vaping lobbyists and manufacturers. I think that that would probably be a good standard to set as you continue to move forward. I'm sure that even if you haven't met with them yet, I expect that there were meetings requested and that there will definitely be more, because there's a lot of people making a lot of money off addiction. We know that.

Whether you look at the cautions that are being heeded by folks who are saying that this needs to be expanded to include flavours, who are saying that flavours attract people to vaping and then that leads to further addictions and other challenges or whether you believe that it transitions you out of addiction, either way it's an hourglass. There's a piece in the middle, and that's what we need to focus on: how do we make sure we create the conditions to reduce opportunities for addiction and to support people who are on a path to breaking addiction as well.

I'd say, number one, obviously, is having good strong public health and a patient health home, a family medical clinic, whatever that might look like for you, but having that health home and having that primary care provider that you feel connected to and that you can trust and that you can work collaboratively with. I think that would be number one. I hope that in partnership with this piece today, if we are serious in this place about preventing addiction and

preventing the costs that I know the minister also outlined in his news conference that are related to tobacco-related illnesses on the health care system, I think being preventative and working hand in hand with the patient health home is probably the strongest way for us to prevent a lot of these issues and challenges.

I know that when people feel that they can confide in their health provider honestly, not worried about judgment or not worried about ridicule about what their challenges are, it is much easier to be on a path to recovery. We often talk about recovery in terms of opioids and other inhibitors, but certainly, whether recovery is related to alcohol or related to tobacco use, I think that, obviously, that relationship with your primary health care provider can play one of the biggest roles in supporting Albertans in that journey.

I hope that people don't read the stories and follow along thinking, "Oh, I should start vaping because that's going to help me not be a smoker," because I don't know that the research fully supports that. I hope that young people don't think: "Oh, that's cool. We can still get chocolate-flavoured vape. We can't in some other provinces." Nova Scotia, I think, was the first one to move on that. I'd hoped that we would follow suit when this legislation did come forward. Hopefully, that's something that is forthcoming because I think it is definitely an area of need.

Mr. Getson: Excuse me.

Ms Hoffman: Bless you. You might want to wash your hands. I feel like I'm policing everyone in our caucus about that, too. Thank you so much, hon. member. I appreciate that.

I think that this is an opportunity for all of us to work collaboratively to make sure that we fulfill the intent that I think is behind this bill.

I also want to touch on a piece that I saw in some of the coverage – not all – around taxation rates. I know that in February in the lead-up to the budget the government said that there would be a 20 per cent tax on vaping products. I also have followed some of the back and forth with the media, and it sounds like legislation would be required to bring that in, and that spokesperson from the Minister of Finance's office said that that wouldn't be forthcoming or that there weren't any plans to do so immediately.

9:20

I think the budget did say that it would be in place by the fall. Perhaps there's a bill coming later this session, or perhaps there's a government amendment coming to this piece of legislation. I'm not entirely sure. But I'd be very happy to hear from either the Health minister or the Finance minister on their intention in that regard because that is something that was foreshadowed just a few months ago that I thought would fit nicely into this piece of legislation.

Perhaps there are reasons why it isn't in this piece today, and there are ways that it will be coming in the weeks ahead to keep that pledge that was made in the budget. Or perhaps the budget is not at all intact anymore and we're following different paths. If that's the case, I'd also appreciate an update on the state of the province's fiscal situation. I guess there are always the quarterly updates, but it seems like this would be an appropriate time given that this was an area that was targeted for additional revenue in the budget just a few short months ago.

With that being said, again to reiterate, I think this is generally a move in the right direction. Having parameters around the sale of products, having age restrictions, not having advertising I think is good with regard to vaping.

There are a couple of things that I was expecting to see. One was some sort of mechanism around taxation or revenue collection as it relates to vaping because the government said that they were going

to be doing that. The expansion to also ban flavours and – oh, shoot – there was one more piece that was on the top of my mind. I turned 40 just a few weeks ago, and my brain doesn't retain information the same way as it did at 39. If I keep talking, maybe it'll come up again, though.

I guess the question around whether or not – given that the government said that there were no plans to do so, the taxation piece is definitely a question for me. And there was mention of penalties on this. I think it's \$100 for youth who are consuming. Here is the one: youth. Thank you, Leader, for helping me get back here.

One of the things that folks who worked in the youth tobacco prevention area talked to me about with regard to tobacco sales is that it has been for a very long time illegal for anyone under 18 to buy tobacco products. It still, I believe, isn't illegal for people under 18 to sell them. So there's, of course, that complexity. You'll have somebody who's 16 or 17 being asked to police the behaviours of one of their peers, who could very well even be older than them, so requiring 16-year-olds to police the behaviour of their peers when it comes to buying these products. I imagine that the same sales piece is in place, and if it is in the bill and I managed to glance over it, I'd be very happy for that to be highlighted, not just the buying piece being restricted to adults but also the selling piece. I think that that is an area that is ripe for misuse and for some pressure to build between peers. Of course, that would not be the intent. The intent is to reduce use and to support young people and prevent addictions. That's as I read the act.

Again, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020, Bill 19, I think is definitely a positive piece of legislation. It moves us in the right direction. My questions remain along the lobbying piece, around the taxation piece, around the flavours piece, and around the sales. I think my colleagues have touched on where it's sold. I hope that there will be government members that perhaps can speak a little bit more to that and if there will be further parameters put on that.

Looking at other provinces, I think we do have an opportunity – I know that we're catching up to other provinces in terms of just having a bill, and I'm glad that we are, but once we do catch up, I don't know that that's good enough. I think that we should at least be among the leaders of our peers and try to stay in pace with them as we move forward to provide the very best supports for all Albertans when it comes to this topic.

Lastly, once again, congratulations to everyone who was involved in bringing this piece of legislation forward to this Assembly today. I know it takes a village. I think that everyone should be proud of where they've gotten. I know that there are many people in the public service who would like to see it go much further because they're very passionate about this work, and I want to commend them for that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues, for the opportunity to engage on Bill 19.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Health has risen for questions or comments.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise on any occasion I can to speak about this piece of legislation because it's something I'm very proud of and proud of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Klein in helping in the consultations and chairing the review.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the review of this legislation was mandated in legislation to begin by November, but both Calgary-Klein and I started meeting in the summer to start discussing the review with the ministry and what that review would look like and

the scope of the consultations because it was very important to both him and I. He's a father of young children, and my kids are 10 and 11. My oldest is going to be going into junior high next year.

As I see the rates among our youth when it comes to vaping, it's very alarming, and when we were sworn in April of last year, it was something that I knew was going to become important for me and that this piece of legislation that's now before the House was going to be incredibly important for me as I saw these rates, just thinking about the experience in my own household, my kids coming to an age where they might feel those pressures.

I take the feedback and the questions from our friends opposite and some of the smoke-free advocates and health advocates throughout the province as they ask questions about Bill 19 enabling a government to take steps to limit flavours in vaping as well as the questions that folks have had about the limits on nicotine levels in vaping products, and what I say is this, Mr. Speaker. As I said when we announced Bill 19 and the questions that I took at that time as well as the questions that I took in question period earlier today from the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the answer is still the same: the ministry and I and the Member for Calgary-Klein are going to continue to monitor the situation with vaping among our youth in particular and the measures that we're including here and how that's going to affect the rates.

Look. Could we have gone further? Yes, Mr. Speaker, but what I hear today from our friends opposite, as I said in question period earlier today: the criticism is that we're only doing most of what they failed to do for four years.

I just want to highlight a few numbers that I mentioned in my speech when I first moved second reading, Mr. Speaker. When the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was first sworn in as the Minister of Health, the rate of vaping in our youth – for example, students between grades 10 and 12 in 2014-2015 who had reported that they had tried vaping or had vaped in the previous 30 days – was 8 per cent of students, and it almost quadrupled by the time the previous government was no longer in government. In four years it went up to 30 per cent; almost 1 in 3 students in grades 10 to 12 reported that they had vaped in the previous 30 days. In four years the vaping rates had increased at an alarming rate. An alarming rate.

Albertans, parents, health advocates, and as the Member for Calgary-Klein and I found out, the youth themselves, youth who were vaping, met with us and expressed to us their concerns that they had tried vaping, that they were unable to stop vaping, and they were asking us to take steps to be able to address the rates among them and their friends themselves. They were asking us, because the government in Alberta had not taken steps before as we saw an alarming increase in vaping in those previous four years.

What we have here now is Bill 19, which is a first step in being able to address these alarming rates. We see the current TSRA, Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act, and the way that it addresses and tackles the rates of teens who are smoking and using other tobacco products, and we need to use . . .

9:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on Bill 19? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 19, Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020, in second reading. A piece of legislation just newly introduced, and I've already found the debate being had in this Chamber tonight very informative, with lots of good information being shared. Through my comments I hope to reflect what I've heard from constituents in my constituency,

questions that have arisen for me in reviewing this legislation as well as talking about vaping itself to a small extent.

But first I think I'd like to address some of the comments that were made directly prior to me speaking, comments seeming to imply that because Alberta was led by the NDP for four years, children started to vape and that increases in vaping were because of an NDP-led government in Alberta. I really would suggest to all members in this House that if you look at national data, an increase in vaping is a phenomenon and a trend that we are seeing throughout North America. A number of jurisdictions are implementing legislation to try and tackle this problem, and to suggest that it was because the NDP were the government, that that is why youth began vaping more, seems to be a bit of a misnomer and something I'm a little bit surprised to hear.

Now, I know that under our government work on legislation to reduce vaping as well as consultations with stakeholders had begun, and I'm pleased to see this legislation brought forward. [interjections] And as the member who spoke before me . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member.

I would just ask that if there are members in the House who are looking to engage in extended conversations towards the sides of the House, then I would ask them to perhaps take them out to the lounge.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods could please continue.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will come back to that I'm very pleased to see this legislation introduced, incredibly supportive of the goal to reduce youth vaping and youth smoking and very pleased to see the nonpartisan nature of most of the debate throughout this evening. I really want to express my appreciation to the Member for Calgary-Klein because he has, a number of times already although we're not in Committee of the Whole yet, taken the time to stand and address some of the questions that have been asked by the opposition. I truly appreciate that in the course of debate in this Chamber, so thank you for that.

I think all Albertans share the goal that we are talking about, which is reducing youth vaping, because we know that vaping can increase your exposure to harmful chemicals, and particularly teen vaping can alter brain development. This is something that I think a lot of teenagers aren't aware of. Being able to have conversations about that and opportunities to discuss how important this is: that is really a good thing that this legislation does. Ideally, as media coverage of this legislation rolls out, parents will be able to have conversations with their kids about this important issue.

So making sure that teenagers and parents are aware that there are information and tipsheets available to help you understand vaping and the risks of vaping and to have that conversation with your teen – the Canadian government has some really good info tipsheets on how to have the conversation with your child if you're concerned that they have started vaping or that they might start because of social pressures. Many of my colleagues have already shared the very surprising statistics of how common it is for teens to be vaping right now, so if you are a parent and you are concerned about this, I encourage you to look for those online resources to help you have that conversation, because nicotine is a highly addictive chemical, and many teens are even confused about the presence or absence of nicotine in these devices.

I would say that these devices are not all the same. The vaping devices come in different sizes. They work in different ways. It can be quite confusing when a teen or even an adult is looking at these products and trying to understand. We've heard through the debate that there can be different nicotine concentration levels, depending

on cartridges that you are buying. Being informed on this and understanding that vaping is not a safe alternative to tobacco but, really, an activity that has its own risks and can become addictive as well I think is really important. Moving this legislation forward is going to help us have that conversation with Albertans, with our families, going forward. I think that's really excellent.

Now, I was curious to bring into this debate some of the things that my constituents have said to me. Over the years I've received a number of e-mails related to vaping, some very specific around the advertising. In fact, I received some correspondence in early 2019, someone who was hearing enticing vaping ads on the radio three times an hour and was concerned about the target audience. As well, we know that there have been cases where the advertising, the displays for vape products have been incredibly enticing, colourful, and perhaps even targeted towards youth. Within this legislation we see the steps being started to address that, and that's something I'll be able to follow up with constituents to talk about. I've also received a number of requests for legislation to protect youth from vaping, and I would note that Alberta is now the last province to put in these vaping laws going forward, and it's a very positive step forward.

I've also very recently received several requests for vaping to be deemed an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the perspective of – and the Member for Calgary-Klein was speaking of this – smoking cessation, the fact is that in some of the vaping-specific stores you can get a lower concentration than even you can in convenience store cartridges that people who are using vaping for smoking cessation need. I thought that was very interesting, in reviewing my correspondence, to see that there are certainly a number of citizens here in Alberta who view vaping in that same lens. We're bringing that forward through the COVID pandemic and the closing of businesses.

Now, within the piece of legislation that we have, my colleagues have raised a couple of concerns. Having listened to the debate, my concern echoes theirs around the piece around flavouring. Now, recognizing that there is regulation-making ability – so there will be the ability to potentially limit flavours into the future – I note that the Member for Calgary-Klein suggested that the science is unsettled when it comes to the banning of flavouring and the impact of flavours in attracting youth as well as the impact of flavourings in smoking cessation, those being potentially the two competing pulls, it sounds like.

I'm curious if, through this debate and through the secretariat that has done this work, any of the science or some of that conflicting evidence could potentially be shared, because as a layperson preparing for debate on this piece of legislation and trying to search that out, you get the very, very strong impression that banning flavours has a measurable impact on reducing youth use. A number of other jurisdictions have done that, and when you read their press releases, it sounds like it is a fait accompli, that if they do this, then they will be able to reduce youth vaping. I see it a lot in a lot of the public health advocacy groups, the strong sense that flavouring is a huge attractor for youth and bringing them in.

Now, I note that in Canada rainbow unicorn flavours are no longer allowed – I believe rainbow unicorn was one of them – so that's a positive step forward, an acknowledgment that that type of flavouring title was an attraction to youth. But there does seem to be a very strong public perception that access to more flavouring, something that tastes a little bit sweeter or different, is very tempting to youth. It's quite pervasive when you're researching these topics. The science or evidence that led the Member for Calgary-Klein and the secretariat group to choose to defer flavours to regulation, which I believe the Member for Calgary-Klein also

said – oh, what was the quote? It was the Minister of Transportation: just accept yes.

9:40

Unfortunately, deferring the banning of flavours to regulation is not a yes. Deferring the banning of flavours to regulation is a: maybe we could in the future if we wanted to. So that's really not quite the same thing as a yes. As a member of the opposition caucus and with the research and review that I've done so far, I certainly would like to see more evidence that banning flavours is not helpful, because I've found quite a bit that suggests that it is. With it being deferred to regulation, are there any timelines for when the question around flavouring might be addressed and looked at? If there are concerned parents who see that as an important next step, when might they be able to see that? I know creating regulations, especially for a government with as heavy an agenda as this government has, getting the time and space to do that, can be really, really difficult. Will the regulations for banning flavours be a priority for this government, or will this be something that they could do in the future and it will just sit? That is certainly a question that I have for the member and a concern I have as we go forward.

Now, the consultation process that this secretariat underwent involved talking to a lot of different people and involved a lot of different concerns and engagement. I'd note that the majority of the people who participated through the survey – I mean, the survey was the bulk of the participation – were parents, and I think that shows just how concerned parents of high schoolers, kids in junior high, likely even in elementary, are with this particular issue and wanting to make sure that they have the tools in order to protect their children.

I also noted that we had a number of different public stakeholders who were engaged. The appendix at the back of the prepared materials is quite detailed and lengthy with the number of groups that have been consulted in the development of this. Even with that being said, I would note that the concern identified by the opposition caucus around flavouring does come through in the summary document, again that push/pull, both sides, because the document clearly shows that there are concerns that it may be attractive to youth but also that for smoking cessation there are a number of users through the postcard campaign that was initiated who found that the flavouring helped them choose to quit tobacco and to move into vaping.

In looking at other jurisdictions and how we can effectively reduce youth vaping, making youth vaping unaffordable is incredibly important to discourage the use among young people. I was also very pleased to see that as part of Budget 2020 Alberta will introduce a 20 per cent tax on the retail sale of vaping. When I first heard about this legislation, I thought perhaps we would see that here. So I'm curious to know when that additional revenue and that 20 per cent tax on the retail sale of vaping products to discourage use will be able to be put in place. I note that it will be similar to what's being put in place in British Columbia and is intended to be announced with introduction of legislation in spring 2020. Now, that likely timeline was set pre-COVID, so my question would simply be if we will still be on schedule to have the 20 per cent tax in place for the fall, which is, I believe, accounted for in Budget 2020.

The other question that my colleagues have already raised is around the concentration of nicotine. The Member for Calgary-Klein has stood to address this, that it's complicated, that there are different types of devices, different types of cartridges, that they can be put together in a way where simply saying a certain concentration limit could be complicated. I suppose my question

would be – I understand there are other jurisdictions that have done that – when other jurisdictions have done that, have there been negative consequences? Being able to have superconcentrated vape leads to issues with the practice of juuling, as an example, where the name of Juul actually became a verb.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has caught my eye.

Member Ceci: Yes. I was conscious that my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods hadn't finished her thoughts about Juul and other things, and I, for one, am interested in you completing your thoughts.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to respond.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I will wrap up that thought. I'm not going to define juuling for everyone here – you can go to Urban Dictionary – but high-concentration cartridges allow for that type of practice and encourage that type of behaviour with youth, the more stunting aspect of vaping that you can see in some of the social media culture.

I look forward to the continued debate. I think this has started off very well. I'm looking forward to Committee of the Whole, and I hope that by putting some of my questions and concerns on the record, we might be able to add some of that information to the debate.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available, with about four minutes.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate on the bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. With regard to the bill, Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020, it's my pleasure to stand up this first time and speak to the bill. As I was in the lounge, I was of course listening to all the information, on both sides, that was coming forward, and I appreciate learning more about all of this through those discussions and presentations.

I think the legislation, as far as it goes, is helpful, but as far as it goes, I think it is wanting. The minimum age, 18, for purchase, possession, use of vaping products aligns with tobacco. It makes great sense to do that. The tobacco restrictions in terms of aligning the sale of vaping products with tobacco restrictions: I am conscious of what those are, and I think that makes sense, too, on the tobacco side and vaping to join that.

The restrictions about where the use is prohibited: I like that as well, and I think that leads into the whole idea of not putting it in the space where youth are, young people, particularly children, and the concern around people who are ill, in hospitals, and recovering from illnesses, and keeping it out of those places.

I, of course, reviewed other provinces and what they've done, looked at the information that was available with regard to the government of Alberta and have some comments about all of that that I'd like to share. One of the things that I did was review, I guess, the original press conference where the Minister of Health and the MLA for Calgary-Klein both spoke to the work that they were going to undertake around this to investigate what should be done in terms of the consultations and, ultimately, the bill that's before us and preparing for that.

Some of the comments – I think I've got them correct – from the Minister of Health, and it's just a snippet of what he said: higher

rate of teen smoking than the national average. So recognition that this is an issue, particularly in Alberta, for teens who are smoking. It's higher than the national average, so that would speak to knowing that there's an issue that can be addressed by legislation, as we have also addressed other issues of addictive use of products in this province through legislation.

And through the MLA for Calgary-Klein, the words: vaping is emerging as a key health threat for Albertans, and we want to keep highly enticing, attractive vaping products out of the hands of our kids and teens. The words that are really key in all of that, I think, are "highly enticing, attractive vaping products." This is me kind of parsing that a little bit and trying to think of what is behind those words, and I think it doesn't take too much to kind of think that "highly enticing, attractive" is all about flavours and perhaps the concentrations of nicotine in those vapour pods or liquids.

9:50

With that as kind of a start to some of my comments, I'd like to focus on the flavours in particular. Prohibiting flavoured products is something other provinces have done. They have seen it as a way to slow down and perhaps stop the gateway towards other uses of addictive products. Once a person is addicted and has a habit of smoking tobacco products or nicotine products, it is extremely, extremely difficult to stop and break.

I don't smoke. I have a close association with people who do, and I know that it is very difficult to stop something that has become a habit for so long. It is obviously something you can break, something you can get free from over time and become smoke-free, but it probably is better if you don't start. I've never started. Probably many people in this room have never started smoking, and that's great. If you've started smoking and you're still smoking, it's challenging. Everybody knows that.

The situation about the flavoured products, I think, is the concept behind "highly enticing, attractive vaping products." As my colleague for Edmonton-Mill Woods was just saying a few minutes ago, the opportunity, the time, and the space to do what is, I think in most people's minds, the right thing to do at this point in time is here and now. When you're in government, you have a legislative agenda that you'd like to complete, you know, through the course of your term. You break that up, and you do chunks every fall and spring. There are many things that you can't predict that come before a cabinet, come before a minister and their officials that you need to address, and you have to take that opportunity to address those things. Some of those things that you wanted to do in your program fall off because you don't have the opportunity, the time, the space to do them anymore.

There's no guarantee that even in regulation this will be done, and certainly it's something that needs to be monitored. The situation is not a good one for young people, particularly those who are starting on that habit of using these vaping products which can be problematic for their health. We heard a previous colleague talk about that in terms of the monitoring that the medical officer of health is doing now with regard to the impacts of vaping products on our population, and we know that this is something that a high percentage of youth are engaged in. The opportunity to address the alarming rates of vaping amongst youth is here and now, and we can do something about it together in this place.

If you asked people what should be done about vaping products and youth in particular under 18 and you said, you know, "We can eliminate flavoured products and make it so it's not as highly enticing and attractive for young people to use those products," I think that with the nod test most people would say: "That makes sense to me. I can support that." I would just urge the government to pause a little bit and give themselves a little bit of time to think

about this and think about what the broad majority or the majority of Albertans would want with regard to this issue.

The other thing that I think I need to address, of course, is the addictive nature of vapour pods and liquids. I see that other provinces have restricted the amount of nicotine that's permitted per millilitre in those products. I think that, similarly, is something that should be done in this province as a way of recognizing that the addictive nature of these products requires government involvement to ensure that the product does not have an effect on a person beyond their capability to deal with it. The addictive nature of cigarettes is something we know and that government has acted in the past to address. I would just see the same thing being necessary with regard to these liquids and vapour pods.

I do want to speak a little bit about, I think, what we all want. We all want to reduce youth vaping. We all want to make sure that, like smoking, vaping products are not in the hands of young people under 18, for sure. We all probably share that same concern and that same goal.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the situation is one where we can be amongst the leaders in this area. I think that opportunity to be amongst the leaders is with us today. Waiting and monitoring the situation and potentially coming back with a regulation to address it is not leading. It is waiting. It is perhaps being behind the curve. The curve is towards greater health for our population, and I think that's certainly in the interest of budgets. It's in the interest of quality of life for Albertans. We've always striven to make sure that we're amongst the leaders in all things we do in this province.

I talked about budgets. I don't want to necessarily look at the taxation part of it, but I do want to look at the health impacts part of it. The health impacts of the addictive nature of nicotine are very, very dire. There's a great outlay of provincial dollars for our health system to address the needs of people who necessarily need the support of the health system as a result of the impact that their addictions and the different physiological impacts from smoking and other products will give them.

The work to get us here today has been helpful. It is something, I think, where we don't want to stop being assertive and aggressive to try and make sure that we're doing as much as we can on this file.

10:00

Just looking around, of course, at the crossjurisdictional review of some of the other provinces and what they're doing, it looks like more can be done in legislation. It looks like more has been done in other provinces in legislation. The colleague that spoke just before me talked about the proliferation of products that has taken place since 2014-15 and the use of those products. Certainly, if this was on the radar – and I'm kind of speaking for myself, but I believe the same thing for my colleagues – we would have done more.

We did work, of course, to eliminate flavours from tobacco products for youth, and that was a positive step in the right direction. Then the vaping products became more prolific, and we have the opportunity to make them less attractive, less highly enticing, attractive vaping products.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to take part in questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any hon. members wishing to take part in debate on Bill 19? I see the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has risen to join debate.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to be able to rise tonight and speak to Bill 19 at second reading.

There have already been, of course, a number of good points outlined by my colleagues and by people on both sides of the House with respect to the history behind this legislation, so hopefully I won't be too repetitive.

What this bill does, of course, to a large degree, is that it replicates the legislation around tobacco, primarily expanding the limitations to include vaping products. Fair enough. On that matter, we have a couple of questions because it does appear as though it also makes a couple of changes with respect to the use of tobacco products along with making changes or adding restrictions on vaping. In particular, what I'm referring to is what appears to be a more significant bar on the use of tobacco products of any kind in and around hospitals. That does seem to be a change from what was in place before, so I certainly look forward to hearing from members opposite on whether that is, in fact, a change and exactly how they see that rolling out.

Obviously, it often makes great sense that you wouldn't see people smoking in and around a hospital, because people are sick, and obviously we all understand the problems with second-hand smoke. But, at the same time, I'm sure everybody here can think of times when they've gone to a hospital and have seen outside the hospital patients and/or staff, at some distance away from the hospital, consuming tobacco products, just as you would, say, for instance, around this building. If you go outside to the parking lot, you will find both staff and elected members sometimes outside consuming tobacco products.

Let me say that, obviously, like all people here, I very much want to see the elimination or reduction of the use of tobacco products because it's a profound health problem. But we also understand that some people definitely do use tobacco products, and that is their choice to do and their right to do as long as they don't do it in a way that creates a lack of safety for others. For that reason, many people in this world use tobacco products and do so in distanced positions in relation to this building and the Federal Building. So that's a thing.

What we know is that that's actually a thing that has historically happened in and around hospitals, again both for patients who might be at the hospital receiving treatment for chronic and stressful conditions, which may or may not be related to tobacco consumption, as well as for staff. I think that probably most surveys will tell you that health care staff smoke at a higher rate than many other people because, again, there tends to be quite a high level of stress and also very unpredictable work hours, that are more inclined to create the temptation to use tobacco products.

My question simply is: is there a substantive change there? It does appear that way in the bill. Was there consultation with staff or representatives of staff? What was the thought with respect to patients who might be long-term patients in the hospital but who don't fall under the definition that appears later on in the bill in relation to in-patient residents of living facilities or living centres? I think, in particular, about some of those addiction programs that might actually exist within a hospital setting, and I also think, again, of patients who have very chronic conditions who might be in the hospital for a very long time.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I myself just think, for example, of a dear friend of ours who was in the ICU for about a month last June and then stayed on the ward for an additional two and a half months before he finally left the acute-care treatment that he was receiving at the hospital. He was going outside as quickly as he could to have his cigarette adjacent to the parking lot in a way that was distanced from other people outside of the hospital. Now I'm wondering: have we changed that so that that doesn't happen?

If that is the case, I'm more than interested to hear what the considerations are around that and what the recommendations were. But it is certainly a change both for some patients as well as staff. I'm simply looking to get information on it. It's an interesting question. There are strong arguments on both sides of that issue, about what would be the best way to manage it. Certainly, some of those arguments are reflected in the other exemptions that relate to in-patient residents of living facilities. So that is a question.

Otherwise, what we see here, again, of course, is basically the introduction of legislation to limit youth access to vaping and vaping products. It's a good thing. It needed to happen, absolutely. It would have been nice if we'd had a chance to get to it in the time when we were the government. Absolutely, it was something that had to happen in Alberta to catch up with the rest of the country.

But now that we are at this, the question becomes: are we doing this as well as we should be? As my colleagues have identified, there are essentially two fundamental issues that, many people argue, we're not doing as well as we should be. One relates to nicotine, both the limits on the amount of nicotine as well as the associated products that would impact the way in which the nicotine is processed within the bloodstream and whether there should be limits on that – that's the one piece – and the other piece, of course, is flavour.

Now, I would argue that we should be putting a limit on the amount of nicotine that exists in these products. In fact, most people, it appears, made that argument when they were being consulted by this government. Vape shop owners made the argument and articulated their experience that most people didn't actually seek a product that would have significantly more nicotine than what the cap is in a province like B.C. Instead, the only place where you saw the objection to putting a cap on nicotine was through the major, large tobacco companies. Those were the ones who were coming in pretty significantly saying: no, don't put in a limit.

10:10

Everyone else – the retailers and, obviously, the antismoking advocates and the health advocates – was saying: put a limit on nicotine. So we had all those folks on one side, and then we had the big tobacco companies on the other side saying: "Nope. Don't put a limit on it." The argument was: "Oh, we need to have that ability to have much higher amounts of nicotine in order to help those chronic, chronic, chronic smokers who just can't get off smoking any other way."

Now, I would suggest that there is another way, Madam Speaker. I would suggest that if you actually have a chronic smoker who is genuinely using vaping as a means of getting off smoking and can't do it without having more than 20 milligrams of nicotine in the vaping product that they're using, well, then you just get that person to get a prescription. Then they can get the product with more nicotine through a prescription. It's simple. We're not inviting kids to get exposure to that much nicotine, we're not inviting other folks to get exposure to that much nicotine, but those people who are chronically trying to get off cigarettes could go to a doctor to get that prescription. That, to me, is really the only compelling argument that was offered, at least transparently, by the big tobacco companies, who argued very much against it.

Now, I will say that later on – I think it's in the consultation document – there is a piece that talks about how much people, on average, report that they spend on a monthly basis on cigarettes, on vaping products, on a series of other products that I can't remember right now. What I will say, although it's not quite up front, is that when you look at that, you see, strangely, that people who vape actually spend more on vaping than smokers do, which is a heck of

a thing because smokers spend a heck of a lot of money. Yet vaping actually provides the opportunity for way more money to be spent. So I think that, at the end of the day, the real reason that the big companies don't want to see a limit on nicotine is that they want to actually have their customer base migrate to vaping because there's more money to be made there. But there's not more money to be made there if there is a limit on nicotine.

So, you know, we think that that is something that should happen, and we note that in the legislation right now, the legislation does not give the government, should they choose to exercise this option, the authority to legislate or regulate around nicotine caps nor on the other associated chemicals or products that would facilitate an accelerated processing of the nicotine products in the bloodstream.

Frankly, both those things need to be done if we're going to do this well. So even if the government wants to delay making those decisions and wants to delay taking on the big tobacco companies, they should give themselves the authority to do it, because, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo wisely described and as the members opposite, I'm sure, have noticed in the midst of the current unplanned circumstances in which they find themselves, finding time on the cabinet agenda and in the legislative agenda when you are dealing with a whole bunch of other problems that you didn't really plan to be dealing with is actually a bit more of a challenge than you expect.

Here we are dealing with this piece of legislation, so why not give yourself the authority to make regulations around nicotine and the associated substances that impact the way in which the nicotine is processed within the bloodstream? That would be an amendment that we probably would be looking at at some point very quickly. So that's what we have to say about nicotine.

Now, we also, of course, have to talk about flavour. We all know that flavour is far and away – there's no question here. You know, every time the big tobacco companies say, "Oh, no, flavour is just about finding a way to get that poor woman that's been smoking for 30 years a new way to get off cigarettes," you know, no. Flavour is about attracting young people to nicotine. It's about getting them addicted, full stop, the end. The research is unequivocal on this. That is why antismoking advocates and health advocates have been fighting for decades to reduce flavour opportunities in any kind of sort of nicotine-processing product that we have. That is something that should have happened here, and it is, as many of my colleagues have already identified, something that has happened in other jurisdictions.

Now, the Minister of Health did take the opportunity to pop up and embark on, I mean, in the overall context of, sort of, you know, partisan runs at the opposition. It wasn't particularly intense relative to what we often see in here, but relative to the tone of the debate that preceded it, a little bit of a partisan run suggesting that, you know, they don't have to do better because we were in government for four years and we didn't introduce legislation, so anything that they do is therefore beyond reproach. I would reject that notion. I would reject it for a couple of reasons.

Quite honestly, here we are dealing with vaping. Vaping is something that the statistics themselves identify as a relatively new issue, that the science is evolving on, and the popularity of it has gone from virtually nowhere to quite significant over a very short period of time, and, yes, we should have seen where it was going faster and found the time on the legislative agenda to get to it faster. Yes, absolutely, I agree with that.

But let's not get too wrapped up in our virtue blanket over there, because I'll tell you something. When we first got elected in 2015, one of the things we did there was that we brought in a ban on menthol cigarettes. Now, was that something that we had to do because menthol was this brand new exciting thing that had only

been in play for three or four years and the previous Conservative government just didn't have time to get to it? Hmm.

Let me tell you a story, Madam Speaker. When I started smoking, I was 17. I started smoking because of menthol. I smoked a pack a day for almost 20 years. I'd like to say that that got me to 2015, but it didn't. It got me to about 1996. What my point is is that people understood for a very, very long time that flavoured cigarettes and menthol were absolutely the gateway to young people smoking. The Conservative government that had been in place for 44 years understood for all that time that menthol cigarettes were probably the worst offender in terms of being the way in which young people started smoking, and after 44 years they still didn't do anything about it.

So I would not get too wrapped up in just how brilliant the government is currently in moving on vaping given the unfortunate history they had with respect to acting to ban flavoured tobacco and the worst offender in the flavoured tobacco world in the previous 44 years prior to our banning the menthol flavour in 2015.

Now, I will say, though, I mean, it's absolutely true what the Health minister says, that from 2015 to now we've seen the use of vaping increase significantly among young people. He cites the statistics: 8 per cent to 30 per cent. That is a very scary rate. I would use, then, those statistics in this debate in a different way. I would say that if vaping, the flavoured aspect of it, was so successful at attracting new people to it and the associated addiction, that it was over the course of four years able to increase its customer base fourfold, then presumably one would want to act very, very quickly to stop that rate of increase; one would not want to give oneself the ability to do it and then not put a deadline on one's actions to stop it. Clearly, it is increasing. Clearly, it is becoming increasingly popular, and there's no evidence to suggest: oh, no; well, it hit 30, and now it's going to flatten because we always knew that 30 per cent was the maximum number of people that would ever consider vaping. No, no, no. There is no evidence out there to suggest that. For all we know, we could be at 50 per cent next year or 75 per cent two years after that. The point, then, is: let's act now to slow down and reverse that very concerning trend.

10:20

We know that banning flavours is the fundamental tool in doing that, yet let us go back to this issue of who wanted to do what with respect to vaping when you engaged in your consultation. It is very clear that the most vocal opponents not only to putting a cap on nicotine but also the vocal opponents to putting a ban on flavours were the big tobacco companies. Now, I don't want to get super, super partisan, but since, you know, the minister kind of opened the door on this, I think one thing that is kind of important to point out is the following. The government did a very good job pursuant to the United Nations – I'm not sure exactly what it was – rule in terms of identifying who they met with and describing what the meetings were about. So we do know that the big tobacco companies – big surprise – articulated certain positions on the two pieces that are absent from this legislation. We know that they met with them, and that is really good.

What's not quite as up front in the reporting is who it was that was in the room on behalf of the tobacco companies. Well, let's see. We've got Nick Koolsbergen who, I believe, when not working as an advocate for the large tobacco companies or prior to that, also served as the Premier's campaign director and was also the opposition caucus chief of staff for the UCP prior to leaving in order to run the Premier's election campaign. We also have on the lobby registry for these large tobacco companies a fellow named Brad Tennant who, I believe, was until not too recently the executive director of the UCP and also the former fundraising director of the

UCP. We also have Sonia Kont who was a director of fundraising for the UCP and was a member of the UCP unity negotiation panel and the Energy minister's nomination campaign chair. And then we have Matt Solberg. Lovely guy. I think, you know, he gets along with pretty much everybody but, we all know, is very much linked to the UCP and its predecessor, the Wildrose. Then there are actually about seven or eight other people who have very close connections to the political fortunes of this government.

But, suffice it to say, I think my point is made. These are the folks that are the lobbyists for the big tobacco companies that were quite successful at ensuring that we had no nicotine cap in this legislation nor any ban on flavours. So I would suggest that, you know, it's arguable that maybe there is a bit of partisanship in this. I don't know.

Either way, I think, ultimately, we all know that the more people who become addicted to vaping and become addicted to nicotine, and, ultimately, either that is preceded by or associated with or followed by smoking, all of that is bad for the health and well-being of Albertans. Reducing the number of young people who become addicted to nicotine is absolutely, conclusively good for the health and well-being of Albertans. We want to reduce nicotine addiction and reduce youth uptake on vaping, and the best way to do it is by capping the nicotine use and also by banning flavours. So we certainly hope that we can get perhaps some time limit on moving forward on the banning of flavour as well as seeing the government give itself the authority in this legislation to also put limits on nicotine in terms of the vaping products.

Nonetheless, all of that being said, there is no question that this is a first step, and it's one that needed to happen. We're certainly pleased to see that it's happening. Let me just say that while we will be proposing amendments to this bill, we will also, you know, hopefully see those amendments accepted. Either way, certainly, we'll be voting in favour of the bill because some action is better than no action. We're pleased to be able to ultimately support the passage of this bill.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I need to just rise to set the record straight because of something the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona just suggested in regard to the people that were in the room for the consultation. First of all, I was in the room. I was the one that was conducting the review. It was very important to us that we were very transparent in this entire process in regard to whom we met with, what was discussed.

For the record every name that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona just said, every name that she just mentioned, not one of those individuals joined in the consultations with me in that process. I think it's important because I don't like what's being insinuated here in regard to my integrity, frankly speaking, and in regard to this process and my commitment to making sure that we consulted everybody, that we took everybody's opinion, and that this legislation was informed by Albertans.

I think it's absolutely critical to clarify, too, that, yes, sure, the larger companies had certain recommendations around nicotine and flavours, but we also heard from a vast, vast number of everyday Albertans. Maybe the member wasn't listening earlier when I got up to talk about this, but we heard from thousands of people across Alberta. We heard it mentioned in regard to the cards that were submitted – these were from adults, from average, everyday Albertans – talking about the importance of flavours in regard to their moving from tobacco products to vaping products.

So I would ask the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to be careful about what she's insinuating in regard to the integrity of myself, this government, and this review. If she would like to apologize, that would be great, but I don't expect that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much. I imagine that there were multiple conversations. I solely, Madam Speaker, am working off the lobby registry, which is a public document, which identifies very clearly the people that are doing the work. I have no doubt that there may have been discussions that the member was involved with, but the lobby registry also suggests that these folks also were doing that work. Whether that was separate, that may be a thing.

The lobby registry is there for the benefit of Albertans to have access to the transparency that is required and provided by a lobby registry. These folks appear on that registry in the way that I identified, so that is why, then, we would be referring to them because that's where they are. You know, I think that it is reasonable for folks to just have that reminded because not every Albertan is necessarily going to go to the lobby registry and check those things. It's a relevant issue. It doesn't in any way negate whether or not those particular people were in meetings with the member that was doing his consultations.

I also know, notwithstanding, that he was doing consultations with many Albertans, that the way government works is that lobbyists will also and often talk to many other people. They don't necessarily just talk to one person. In fact, I've never met a lobbyist who limits their conversations to one member of government.

So it is in no way an aspersion or a suggestion with respect to the member. It is merely a reporting of what is publicly available in the lobby registry.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

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

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

10:30

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think we had some wonderful questions and some great debate tonight. I would encourage all members to vote for second reading.

Thank you.

I move to close the debate. Is that what I say? I close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

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).

[Adjourned debate June 3: Mrs. Savage]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The motion before us today is an important step that our government is taking to support and reaffirm the rights of millions of law-abiding gun owners all across this country. Canadian gun owners have been repeatedly and unfairly targeted and blamed for the past several decades for crimes committed by a select few with zero connection to them. Blaming and taking away legal gun owners' access to their firearms for crimes committed by others is equivalent to banning cars because we have a problem with drunk driving.

As the MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche my constituents have come forward voicing their concerns over the federal government's decision to ban approximately 1,500 models of firearms. Owning firearms in rural Alberta is extremely common. In many ways it's part of our rural culture. Countless people in my riding rely on hunting and wild game to feed their families, in fact.

Here are a couple of statistics to put this situation into perspective. There are between 15 million and 20 million legally owned guns in Canada. These guns are used for hunting, sport shooting, protection, recreation, competition, predator control, and many other uses. These guns are owned by over 2 million men and women with a firearms licence authorized by the police. It is outrageous that the federal government is targeting such a large group of Canadians for the horrific and already illegal actions of a select few.

Furthermore, the new bans are not focused on reducing crime at all. Canada already has some of the strictest laws in the world. In fact, in 1977 the government of Canada banned fully automatic firearms. Trudeau, though, has justified his ban to Canadians by saying that the guns that were targeted, and I quote, were to kill the largest number of people in the shortest amount of time. Yet some of the guns that were included in this ban include guns that are used by Olympic athletes in Olympic events. Mostly, recreational sport shooting more generally is targeted by this.

It also effectively is a ban on guns that look scary. In fact, there are gun groups online that have pointed out that the rules are inconsistent and focused more on the looks of firearms than what they actually do. In fact, there's even some debate online as to whether this ban extends to shotguns used for fowl hunting. Gun crime is a prevalent issue, especially in our major cities, and it needs to be handled with effective and statistically backed legislation and changes but not through laws created for the purpose of virtue signalling and political brownie points.

According to figures from Statistics Canada there were 651 homicides across the country in 2018, a 4 per cent decrease from the previous year. This number gets even smaller when you consider that fewer than 250 of these homicides were committed with a firearm, and of those 250 only 84 involved a rifle or a shotgun. This is in contrast to nearly 2,000 who died in automobile accidents, 4,100 drug overdoses, and 4,900 who died from falls that year. Every one of these deaths is tragic, but a gun ban is not the magic solution that will bring violence to an end.

Again, Canada has one of the lowest violent crime rates in the world, and the majority of this violence is gang related and involves illegally acquired and owned handguns. Perhaps the minister of public safety should have listened to the facts coming from Mark Saunders, his successor as Toronto police chief, who revealed last December that 82 per cent of the handguns in his city came from the United States. They didn't even come from Canada. If the minister of public safety wants to keep his constituents safe, then he's targeting the wrong people and the wrong guns.

A report from Public Safety Canada summarizes the situation best.

Under all levels of gun control, one finds the majority of crime guns come from either the grey market . . . which are purchased second-hand

. . . or through the black market . . . This suggests that greater regulation of the legal, primary market will only be effective if one can also shut down or cripple the illegal secondary market.

We have seen countless examples of the ineffectiveness of gun bans from the U.K. to Australia. In the five years following the handgun ban in the U.K. both violent crime and gun crime steadily increased despite the number of licensed firearms decreasing by half. The same applies to Australia's attempt in 1996. The rate of armed robberies dramatically increased and was doubled by 2001. This number did not drop below the pre gun ban rate until 2010, over 15 years later. Shockingly, the minister responsible for the legislation already knows that gun bans aren't needed. In fact, when the minister of public safety was asked in September why his government wasn't implementing a ban on handguns, he responded: as I travelled across Canada, I met a lot of reasonable handgun owners who are incredibly careful about acquiring guns legally, storing them securely, and using them responsibly. Are the gun owners that Ottawa is now targeting unreasonable? Are the Albertans who own shotguns and rifles purchasing them illegally? The answer, Madam Speaker, is no. We know that. So does our federal government.

Why was the federal government willing to meet with the owners of handguns when they're ignoring gun owners subject to their current firearms ban? The reason that these types of bans don't work is that the majority of guns that are used in crimes are already banned altogether and have been smuggled into the hands of criminals that aren't legally allowed to own them in the first place. The way to tackle this issue is not to take away rights from law-abiding Canadians but to find the origin of these illegal guns, fight gang violence in our cities, and provide additional support to those struggling with mental health issues. The mass gun ban was poorly planned and implemented and will do absolutely nothing or very little at very best to keep Canadians safe.

Many of these weapons were chosen purely because of the way they look. Most of them are functionally no different than a typical hunting rifle with government mandated five-bullet magazines and limited to a semiautomatic firing rate. Banning something merely encourages criminals to purchase it on the black market while depriving law-abiding citizens that same access. The most effective way to curb gun violence is to prevent guns from falling into the hands of the wrong people. I believe that the federal government needs to crack down on guns being smuggled in from the United States and work on stopping the second-hand sale of weapons. This ban is about politics, not public safety. Ottawa knows that smuggled handguns are the problem, not firearms that fall under Alberta's make-believe assault-style classification. Politics are exactly why Ottawa decided to restrict the freedom of Albertans to please but not to protect Montreal and downtown Toronto supporters.

We urge Ottawa to allow Parliament to scrutinize this ban and reconsider this reckless motion. I would urge all of my colleagues in this Chamber to support this motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the Chamber to speak in support of Government Motion 20. Over the past few weeks I have heard an outpouring of concern from a number of my constituents regarding the federal gun legislation. These residents in my community are law-abiding gun owners, who feel that they are being penalized while criminals are the ones who should be targeted.

I grew up on the prairie, learning how to safely operate a gun. One of our family activities was deer hunting. Once our hunting mission was successful, we took that animal home, and that meant meat to eat for the week. As a community we enjoyed attending wild game night. This was a very well-attended evening. The meat was bought from local hunters to share with everyone at the event. To this day my father and brothers still get together with my cousins, who live several hours away, for their annual hunting excursion.

10:40

Madam Speaker, my constituency of Camrose has a number of cattle operators, where guns are used to protect the herd from predators. These guns are needed to ensure the safety of the animals, which are raised to provide food. The safety of these animals is crucial to the operation. Guns are used as a deterrent to scare off predators, and these guns are obtained in a legal manner.

The gun clubs in my community are enjoyed by many. The guns used at these facilities are purchased legally and enjoyed in a responsible manner.

Skeet shooting is another activity that's very popular. In fact, my brothers enjoy the sport and when they were young were extremely successful. These guns, too, are used in a responsible manner.

When I travel to Bashaw, one of my favourite stops is always the Bashaw sports club. When you walk into this store, you'll be astonished at the good selection of guns this local entrepreneur has available. It's always my pleasure to thank them for their contribution to the local economy. I'll visit with this community soon to see how the federal government's changes have impacted their business.

Rural crime has been a terrible issue. Minister Schweitzer came out to Camrose to meet with my concerned residents in a town hall meeting. The ballroom was filled to capacity. Every one of these people had a story to tell on how they were robbed and some of them at gunpoint. Rural theft has reached a dangerous level, Madam Speaker. Many people are robbed multiple times. They are frustrated, and they don't feel safe.

Thank goodness our UCP government has put forward this motion. We are standing up for rural Albertans. How dare – how dare – the federal government overstep its reach and penalize law-abiding Albertans and Canadians. We are not criminals and should not be treated as such, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for comments or questions.

Any other speakers wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House in favour of Government Motion 20. I'm proud to represent the many legal firearm owners in my riding, law-abiding citizens who are already following the strict laws that are put in place. The application to obtain a licence to possess and acquire firearms is thorough. For those who've not applied for their firearms licence in Canada before, I want to walk you through the questions in the personal history section that each person who is 18 years of age and over must fill out when applying for the possession and acquisition licence under the Firearms Act.

- (a) During the past five (5) years, have you been charged, convicted or granted a discharge for an offence:
 - (i) under the Criminal Code or the Youth Criminal Justice Act where violence was used, threatened or attempted;
 - (ii) involving the misuse, possession or storage of a firearm; or
 - (iii) involving trafficking or importing drugs or controlled substances?
- (b) During the past five (5) years, have you been subject to a peace bond, protection order or an order under section 810 of the Criminal Code?
- (c) During the past five (5) years, have you or any member of your household been prohibited from possessing any firearm?
- (d) During the past five (5) years, have you threatened or attempted suicide, or have you suffered from or been diagnosed or treated by a medical practitioner for: depression; alcohol, drug or substance abuse; behavioural problems; or emotional problems?
- (e) During the past five (5) years, do you know if you have been reported to the police or social services for violence, threatened or attempted violence, or other conflict in your home or elsewhere?
- (f) During the past two (2) years, have you experienced a divorce, a separation, a breakdown of a significant relationship, job loss or bankruptcy?

Madam Speaker, if you answered yes to any of these questions that I just asked, you must provide further details. If the details are not attached to your application, it cannot be processed. Obtaining the licence to possess a firearm is not a quick process. Where in anger can you decide you want to own your first gun and walk out of the store with it on the same day?

The recent announcement by the federal government to reclassify more firearms and devices as prohibited is not going to make this country safer. The federal government continues to prioritize regulatory changes for legal firearms owners over cracking down on the smuggling of illegal firearms into the country. Evidence shows that the recent announcement of a firearms prohibition will not be effective. Criminals who are committing crimes with illegally obtained guns are already not following the existing strict guidelines in place around who can carry and who cannot own firearms in this country. The ban was not well thought out; it was a rush to judgment.

The federal government is allowing a transition period of two years to protect owners of newly prohibited firearms from criminal liability while they take the steps to comply with these new rules. If the guns are dangerous – and by these guns I mean over a hundred thousand restricted firearms that are now among the prohibited models – how could we allow them to be in the owners' hands for more than two years?

There are exceptions under the amnesty for indigenous peoples exercising aboriginal or treaty rights to hunt and for those who hunt or trap to sustain themselves or their families. These exceptions will allow for continued use of newly prohibited firearms in limited circumstances until a suitable replacement can be found. By the end

of the amnesty period all firearms owners must comply with the ban. Again, if we can trust these owners to safely use these guns for the next two years, what will change in that trust when the two years are over?

We also know that the federal government is planning to implement a buyback program. What it may look like in terms of the dollar amount is still a mystery. Instead of rushing to make a long list of firearms prohibited, among which are many questionable choices to say the least, the government should have worked with stakeholders and public consultation to craft a plan that will have a real effect in reducing gun violence.

Madam Speaker, to quote our Premier: often personnel is policy. Our province needs to have a chief firearms officer who focuses in on the criminal misuse of firearms, not more bureaucratic red tape for law-abiding citizens. We need someone who understands the difference between a farmer using legally obtained firearms to protect his livestock from a coyote, someone who shoots for sport, and a criminal who is smuggling illegal weapons across our border for use in criminal activity.

Madam Speaker, I support and stand with legal gun owners in Fort Saskatchewan and in our province and in our country, and I proudly support this motion. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let's face it. The federal firearms ban is ridiculous. Not only was this ban made by the federal government when they knew they would face less criticism, but it targets law-abiding gun owners in Canada and especially here in Alberta.

Yesterday I spent some time on the phone with a constituent named Ray from the Crowsnest Pass. As he explained to me, he was confused that he had somehow gone to bed one night a law-abiding Canadian and woke up a criminal the next day. I know that many other Albertans feel the same way.

Madam Speaker, the federal government's gun ban is nothing but a mean-spirited virtue signal to its base that attacks the rights of good people across rural Canada. It didn't take long to discover just how vacuous and empty this signal was. Along with the 1,400-some variants of what ended up being about two dozen guns or pieces of artillery, the Liberals managed to ban airsoft guns, two websites, and, with a quick Google search, a coffee company run by veterans. But this form of weak virtue-signalling legislation is easier to create and more popular to sell to the cadre of Laurentian elites that make up the base of the Liberal Party of Canada than, say, a crackdown on illegal smuggling across the border, the source of weapons used in the vast majority of gun-related crimes in Canada.

Instead of addressing the issue of illegal guns, the federal government plans to spend taxpayers' dollars buying back firearms from law-abiding Canadians. This money would be better put to use pursuing the smugglers and drug gangs that plague our society. Along with stopping illegal guns from coming across the border, the federal government needs to impose harsher sentences on violent criminals who use these illegal guns. I agree with my friend Ray, and I call on the federal government to bring back tough, mandatory sentences for the criminals who flagrantly endanger Canadians with the use of these illegal guns. We should not be punishing those who have purchased their property legally and have owned these items safely while committing no crimes. The federal government is making people who legally obtain guns criminal.

They are imposing harsh restrictions that have no impact on the real issue of illegally obtained guns.

10:50

Many Albertans that I have spoken to are concerned with the firearms ban for many reasons, and I would like to let them know that our government supports the safe use of legally obtained firearms here in Alberta. I have heard from many of these law-abiding people, and I know that many of my colleagues have also heard from them, and I know that we plan to and we will represent them here and to Ottawa. Madam Speaker, law-abiding Albertans who own guns for hunting or for sport should not become the victims of a government that prefers to virtue-signal rather than offer substantial policy.

I could go on at length about this awful change, but I would really like to give my colleagues the opportunity to have a chance to speak as well. But before I finish, let me quickly explain one of the reasons this move is so concerning for me personally. When we see the governing party of Canada obviously design legislation that's aimed at shoring up urban support in a handful of urban centres rather than governing for the good of all Canadians, I think Albertans have a right to be worried about the future plans of this federal government. If the government of Canada is more focused on holding onto their voter base than governing for the good of law-abiding Canadians most impacted by these changes, I think this spells danger for a number of things that are important to us as Albertans, and it sets us on a frightening slippery slope.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the motion? I see the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Perhaps the most vital responsibility of government is to protect its citizens, and COVID-19 is a prime example of that. Facing an unknown virus and having limited information from communist China, a country that clearly withheld critical information from the international community, governments around the world had to make tough decisions regarding the health and safety of their citizens. The well-being of those individuals, their family members, their communities was paramount, or at least it should have been. In the wake of thousands of people dying around the world and with panic about the unknown of this pandemic, there are measures that should have been undertaken quickly.

In Taiwan they immediately cut ties with the socialist Marxist Chinese regime and stopped all traffic from China. Our Prime Minister did not do that. Justin Trudeau and his team held on to their ideology about open borders. They said that it was discriminatory and racist to shut down border traffic. Even after every province in Canada had called a state of emergency, the Justin Trudeau government continued to allow international travel without restrictions, quarantine, or health screening. Trudeau continued to allow hundreds of illegal foreign nationals to cross the border at Roxham Road every day without adequate health measures being taken. These decisions allowed the pandemic in Canada to spread and increase the country's mortality rate significantly. If the federal government had acted as other successful nations, thousands of lives could have been saved. Thousands perished unnecessarily because of this Prime Minister and his ideology.

In Canada we now have well over 7,000 COVID-related deaths in a matter of a few months, and sadly there will be many more. In 2018 Canada had 249 gun-related homicides, with a large

percentage from illegally owned firearms. Justin Trudeau had an opportunity to save 10, 20, or even 30 times this number of people around the pandemic, but he refused to act because it was not in line with his ideology. Now a misguided Justin Trudeau is at it again, making criminals of tens of thousands of Canadians overnight without adversely affecting a single true offender. This virtue-signalling Prime Minister is using the tragedy in Nova Scotia to implement his ideologically driven political agenda to steal private property from law-abiding citizens.

What happened in Nova Scotia is indescribably tragic, and I can't imagine the pain that is being felt by those families from this senseless act, but the removal of legally purchased and registered guns by licensed owners would have no effect on what happened in Nova Scotia. In fact, the Prime Minister and the Liberal government have paid little attention to the actual issues surrounding this incident. What happened in Nova Scotia utterly defines the problem. The shooter was an individual that illegally possessed weapons, had a criminal history, a history of violence and domestic assault, and one of substance abuse, and showed signs of mental illness.

If this federal government truly intends to have a positive impact, then control the trafficking of illegal firearms that are flooding across our southern border, establish appropriate laws that punish violent offenders, provide more support to those with mental illness, and develop specific protocols for dealing with individuals that have violent tendencies.

Justin Trudeau is spending 600 million taxpayer dollars to purchase weapons that will not save lives. In reality, this Liberal government is doing everything they can to make matters worse in this country. They repealed the mandatory minimums put in place by the Harper government. They are moving to lighter criminal sentences and made it easier to obtain pardons. They're weak on bail and parole measures. They want to reduce border controls, where illegal guns and drugs are transported. They refuse to act against gangs and organized crime that are at the forefront of the illegal arms trade in Canada. This abandonment of responsibility to Canadian citizens has left victims and survivors awestruck.

A large part of why the Liberals do this stems from their belief that all criminals are reformable and that they are better out in society rather than in prison, where they actually belong, and you see this in their actions. They send child murderers to healing lodges, and they give \$10 million to terrorists. The Prime Minister protected himself from potential legal issues around SNC. Bill C-75, introduced in 2018, reduced the sentences on a variety of serious – serious – unjustifiable offences. The Liberals' actions confirm they are soft on crime, and this gun ban does nothing to put the real criminals behind bars.

Ronald Reagan stated that those who seek to inflict harm are not going to be fazed by gun-control laws. So ask yourself: do you believe that individuals must be held accountable for their actions? Do you believe that those who commit violent crimes should be allowed to walk around loose in society, as the Liberals would have, or should we prioritize protecting our communities, our families, our children? The Liberals call this a common-sense law, but in reality it is complete nonsense. It is estimated that about one-third of gun owners will actually submit their possessions in this so-called buyback – a buyback of products which they never owned in the first place, so they can't really buy it back – but apparently the federal government will be required to send in officers to forcibly remove private property from the remaining two-thirds of these gun owners.

Madam Speaker, it's interesting. In the wake of COVID-19, gun and ammunition sales escalated. Why do you think this is? Well, it's because people wanted to protect themselves, and observing the recent deterioration of accountability in society, they became

fearful, fearful that there would not be adequate enforcement to defend their families, and they did not trust the federal government to protect them.

How can you blame them? We just had blockades across this country, saw criminals commit federal crimes without resistance. These culprits burned locomotives, and they sabotaged railway tracks, causing derailments, attacks of domestic violence that went unchecked and unpunished by the Trudeau government. Warren Buffet pulled out of a \$9 billion LNG investment in Quebec, citing political unease about investing under these very Liberals. To further complicate matters, there was a discussion on releasing federal prisoners into society because of COVID. So people legally acquired arms, and now they are criminals in the eyes of Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government.

It should be noted, by the way, that military-grade weapons have been banned in Canada since 1978. Justin Trudeau's ban on assault-style weapons, as he calls it, is based on subjective views of the external appearance of the gun rather than its mechanical abilities. He is discriminating based on appearance. It's playing identity politics in the firearms industry.

11:00

Mr. Speaker, this is really about slowly taking away the rights of Canadians in a step-by-step fashion. This Prime Minister has openly spoken of his admiration for the brutal Communist Republic of China and his love for the human rights criminal Fidel Castro. Now this Liberal government is taking action to implement similar policies found in oppressive regimes.

First, disarm the public with a gun ban. Then we could look at the recent power grab by Trudeau where he tried to obtain fiscal control without Parliament's consent. They monitor social media, pushing to censor Internet content that aligns with their leftist agenda. The Liberals are doling out huge grants to only those media outlets that support their views, effectively ending free press. The Trudeau Liberals made changes to seize more control during elections, and they amended section 253 of the Criminal Code to allow peace officers to enter a person's home for a period up to two hours after driving to give breathalyzers. Now, this is blatantly unconstitutional, and I don't believe officers would do this anyway.

Madam Speaker, the moves and attempts made by this federal government to infringe on the civil liberties of Canadians continues to unfold. In February Trudeau was called the most dangerous man in Canadian political history because of the draconian tactics that he and his government are pursuing, and this latest move to create criminals of law-abiding citizens is a continuation of his socialist agenda and mission to consolidate power.

It's time for Alberta to have a voice in Confederation. It's time for Alberta to obtain our own chief firearms officer. It's time for a review of provincial policing. Madam Speaker, Alberta is not going to stand for the antics of Justin Castro. The citizens of this province spoke loud and clear at the last federal election regarding the trust they have for this Liberal Party, and this UCP government will be there to defend and protect Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. To my colleague: you're a tough act to follow, my friend. God bless you. I love everything you said.

To the other members that have stood here today and talked about it and to the Premier and the minister for my recent appointment: I will do my utmost best to serve the province and to serve the legal firearms owners, being appointed to the Alberta firearms committee.

To the Minister of Environment and Parks: thank you for bringing this motion forward. I know you did something similar last fall, and it was really interesting, Madam Speaker, that we had unanimous consent in the House. There was a division called, and every member of this parliament stood to support the lawful use of firearms. I'm really hoping that that is a repeat, that it wasn't something that just happened once.

I was on a podcast, and it's kind of a new thing for me to be invited to these, and it was a tough act to follow, again, similar to the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. Erin O'Toole was on the call just the day before I was on this podcast. I was regaling the folks in Saskatchewan that actually had this on that we managed to stand up here in the Legislative Assembly and agree on firearms but that when I had Motion 501 for transportation utility corridors, we couldn't have a unanimous vote. Their quotes were: well, it's interesting that Alberta can agree on firearms usage, but you can't agree on the tools to get your economy going. It was kind of interesting to hear that. I think what this did was that it also spoke to the point of how important lawful use of firearms is in our province and also the respect that we have as legislators here for the individuals that actually have, you know, the privilege, if you will, with all those background checks and meet all those requirements to do that.

It was on May 1 when this gun grab came out. Now, I'm not going to go into a bunch of statistics. I'm not going to tell you that none of it made sense. I'm not going to tell you that they took a bunch of firearms that literally were innocuous, at best, that were used for hunting and sport shooting, that weren't even restricted firearms and put them over in the prohibited column. I'm not going to tell you about the actions of them, whether it's a bolt-action or semi-auto action, because that's been spoken about ad nauseam. I'm not going to tell you about the calibre of them, the actual cartridges, because none of it makes sense. I was trying to explain to a colleague of mine who wasn't from the firearms community why this happened, and at that point, after two hours of essentially trying to explain what had taken place, I put it in context.

I asked what that individual's pastime was, and it was skiing. I said: "Okay. Just imagine that Salomon skis have all been forbidden now, so you can't use Salomon skis." "Well, why?" "Well, because they're Salomon." "Yeah, but they're the same as the other skis." "Yeah, but it doesn't matter. It's because they're Salomon." So you pick any brand name that you want, and that is literally what took place.

When you're talking about the 1,500 items that are now considered prohibited, 900 of which are from the Armalite rifle, the AR-15 pattern, which has been out since the '50s, we're talking a 70-year-old piece of technology. Now, the reason why that one is so prolific is that it's essentially the Jeep of the firearms world, so there are bolt-on components, being the buttstocks and being the pistol-grips, and all these other things.

By the way, those items are what become scary to the uninformed. When they're talking about these assault-style weapons, there is nothing as such; what they're talking about is what somebody has seen in a movie or in a book and immediately associates it with what is used for military service. Why would they get this impression, Madam Speaker? Because that's what the Liberals sent out. In their news clippings to the uninformed – and this is the most disingenuous thing you can do; it's the bait and switch – they literally show a soldier using a select-fire rifle, and

then they immediately jump and say that that's what we're getting rid of. Well, who in their right mind would want that? Who in their right mind would say that allowing an average citizen to have these firearms would be reasonable? No one would. And that's the insidious nature of it, not to mention that they did this during the COVID event.

In Nova Scotia I have relatives, and we were supposed to be heading down for a family reunion in Lunenburg this year. So we've got connections back in those areas. The fact that this incident took place had nothing to do with the firearms in my cabinet sitting in my house, that my kids also enjoy with me at the firing range or when we go deer hunting. It had nothing to do with that; it had everything to do with the person with a mental state who was not allowed to have these firearms. Three of the firearms were brought from the States, and arguably it could be said that the one firearm that was of Canadian source was taken from an RCMP officer. None of the things that they are proposing would have stopped this.

When I met with those individuals on May 3 out in my area, the Canadian Historical Arms Society and the Alberta Fish and Game Association presidents, two were ladies that had just taken up the sport. One told a very heartfelt story of how she got into the firearms community. It was literally back in the '80s. She said that the only way that they would get meat on the table was if their dad got that moose every year. That same dad, given these current circumstances, wouldn't be able to use his firearm to do that because it would have made that list. I had service members there that served over 36 years in the Canadian military and now were not deemed responsible enough citizens to be able to do what they do for a pastime, what they do for a hobby.

We have members from the firearms manufacturing community. You talk about economic diversity. These are folks that have machinist skills. They've worked in directional drilling. They've done a bunch of things. They started their own businesses, that Alberta drive, that entrepreneurial spirit, again coming back to that idea that you have the Jeep of the world, and they're building components, either those platforms or components for them. Or the other guy, like, from EM long-range: high-calibre rifles that are designed for sport shooting and reaching targets up to two miles. These \$14,000 to \$20,000 rifles that they're producing down in Leduc are no longer allowed.

Or the firearms gentleman that started his own store and his own business. He's a young guy. He financed himself, and now he has trapped assets that he can no longer have. He can't sell them; he can't do anything – he put his life savings and his dream in this, and overnight – again because of this predatory type of idea of extending rights.

11:10

What really came around the table – and I normally don't use notes, but I wanted to grab a couple of these. Some of the things that came out were: why did I serve? This is coming from a gentleman who's retired now. He goes: why did I serve for 36 years, fly over some of the worst places in the world to fight for their rights and freedoms, to come back here and have mine taken away?

Another one was from the lady who had, you know, taken up the sport. She says: how can we be treated this way? She's a dental hygienist. She has a family. This is something that they do. How can they have those rights taken away?

The other one, too, is another disparaging comment: what's becoming of our system of democracy? Again, these are fundamental freedoms, and it's not necessarily just garnering the assets that have zero value at the end of this.

The other one was: if we don't stand up right now, who's going to stand up for the others?

What really resonated with me at that point was a time in history and a poem from a Lutheran minister. His name was Martin Niemöller. Now, this poem that he wrote was a revelation that he stood by and let things happen until they went too far. I'm going to read that for you, Madam Speaker, if I may.

First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist . . .
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me.

What we're seeing is that under the guise of something else to make people scared, they're literally taking away the rights and freedoms of 2.2 million people who undergo the most scrupulous background checks, where you have your name run through a database every single day to make sure that you're okay to have it, where you have to have people sign for your name every five years and be subject to that, where we willingly give up warrant and seizure rights for the privilege of owning firearms.

If we look at these 2.2 million people, out of the taxpayers in Canada, well, we're looking at about 8 to 11 per cent, depending on the numbers. When you look at how many firearms we own per capita, we're right there with the U.S., but when you look at our crime statistics, we're right down towards the bottom: Norway, Switzerland, those types of areas.

The sad fact is that taking the firearms out of my cabinet at home would not have saved those people in Nova Scotia at all. Instead of finding the root cause and dealing with the main issue of that flow of firearms coming across that border, from which 80 per cent of all gun crimes happen, instead of increasing the dollars and cents, which arguably is \$86 million over five years, 17 and a half million dollars a year, for Canadian borders and customs to do their jobs, they're proposing spending \$600 million to \$1 billion to buy back firearms, that would not have saved a single life. That's the scary part.

What I find very difficult is that because of all of these gun laws and because people get fixated on that, on what these tools actually do, we get set off to the side. You end up in this quagmire of conversation and trying to defend your rights and freedoms. Again, coming back to that point, if we don't speak up right now, if we don't make our voices heard, Madam Speaker, who's going to be there when the next ban comes out?

When we're talking about grandfathering, it's not that I can use these firearms. They literally have to sit there. I can't take them out, I can't use them, and I can't do anything with them. By the way, when they come out in two years, they might be worth whatever they deem them to be. I can't sell them, I can't trade them. I can't do anything with them, not to mention the ammunition that I have sitting there.

To put it in context, let's talk about motorcycles. When I start talking to folks about that, I put it in context. Everyone loves motorcycles. There are different brands of motorcycles, and there are different styles. Let's say, just by chance, that because a statistic shows that 18-year-old to 22-year-old males seem to get in the most accidents with motorcycles and that they seem to be sportbikes, Madam Speaker, anything over 600 CCs is verboten: "You can't touch it. We're going to come back to you in a couple of years. Oh, by the way, if you ride a Honda Shadow, we like that, but we don't

like those Harley-Davidsons because they're loud, they're noisy, and they rumble. And you know those movies you watch? Only bad guys ride Harleys. Well, those are going to be parked in your garage, too."

How about those sports cars? How about that new C8 Corvette that everyone's been saving up for forever. They've been working hard for it, and they get it: "Well, we don't like mid-engine sports cars anymore. Those have to be parked."

Those are the types of messages that come out when I'm reading my Facebook feeds and when I have folks coming out to me and saying: "I worked my back end off. I scrimped and I saved. I did these things. I put my family – I did the right things by my kids, and I went out and I bought a long-range rifle. I saved up my cash, and now I can't even have that."

The consultations that took place, Madam Speaker, when they went across: it was Vancouver. It was Toronto. It was Montreal. It was not rural Ontario. It was not necessarily the Maritimes. It was definitely not out west here that we like to call rural. It didn't take place.

We talk about some of these companies. Prairie Gun Works, a fantastic manufacturing facility. Most of our special forces guys use their service issues. Oh, by the way, they make a lot of hunting rifles that are the same calibre and platforms that are now forbidden.

EM Precision, Alberta Tactical Rifle: there's an ingenious gentleman that was a police officer. He became a welder and a fabricator, and then he had some health issues on that. He ended up using his hands and developing these things. Alberta Tactical Rifle, right out of Calgary, built a bunch of these AR platforms and then developed their own, so three-quarters of their work is now gone. The staff that they have on hand is now gone.

Black Leaf manufacturing: another, you know, former oil field guy started doing this. Black Creek Labs out of Ontario. Colt Canada. People ask: well, why would you want to own something like that? Because they're the epitome of production. They're such a high-quality product now at this point; again, 70 years of development. Again, when I pull the trigger on a semiautomatic, it's one round at a time. They aren't the death machines that they make them out to be or anything else. They didn't talk about any of that. Again, they're lying to the population to pull on the heartstrings, to make them empathetic for something that's not there, to cover the bogeyman.

It was interesting that on Parliament Hill when two soldiers were shot, the individual, that was obviously having some issues or some challenges – he wasn't apparently legally allowed to use a rifle – used an old 1894 lever-action type Winchester. It wouldn't have saved a single thing, taking the Winchester out of my cabinet, but ironically that isn't the one that they banned. They banned rifles that have not been used in these types of crimes in Canada, even the Ruger Mini-14. It's been 30 years since Polytechnique. There are 10 variants right on the rifle. Six of them say Ranch right on the rifle, the Ranch Rifle.

This isn't about doing something to fix the problem. This is that quick fix, the biggest bang for the buck to pull the heartstrings and to take it away from law-abiding citizens. When the long gun registry came out, it was one of the biggest boondoggles. If you want to see one that's bigger, usually the sequel isn't that much better. This one's worse.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Madam Speaker, I was enthralled by those remarks. It's unfortunate that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland was

cut off and ran out of time. I would love to hear the rest of that story and talk about sequels.

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

Mr. Getson: I'm sorry. I missed a part of that. I have that bad left ear.

Mr. Schow: We want more.

Mr. Getson: You want more? Okay. Here we go. The sequel. The sequel.

The long gun registry was a debacle from day one. They spent over a billion dollars on this. They had a bunch of folks working rigorously around the clock to do nothing, literally, is what happened. The Canadian taxpayers took it right in the rear tailgate again on that one, Madam Speaker. Now, this one, it does essentially the same thing. It was such a bad plan that they decided to do it again.

Now, here's what's really crazy. You've got the 1,500 rifles they're talking about. Well, do you realize there are at least two more types that have come out since then? Two more rifles that I know of. Well, actually, one is a semiautomatic shotgun that has never made the list, but now the FRT, the actual firearm registration certificate that goes with it, the typewriting – the Typhoon shotgun now is also part of that. One of the reasons why they cited it, Madam Speaker, is the buttstock, literally the part you put up against your shoulder when you're firing your weapon, your firearm. "Well, that's bad," because it's the same one that can go on an AR-15 or many other types of variants. It's got this thing called a pistol-grip. "Well, that's bad, too," and the fore guard, "Well, it looks the same," so now that one's gone.

11:20

Now, here's another one that hit the list. I couldn't believe it when I talked to the gun shop owner that lives in my neighbourhood. We've had lots of dialogues, and he made me aware of this one. It's not one that I have in my cabinet. I don't normally down talk a gun. It's a little Mossberg 450. I don't even know the model number. Essentially, it's one of the least valued firearms you'd want in your cabinet. It's around \$100, \$120. It literally is for plinking tin cans with hardly any accuracy. The reason why this one became – and it's a 22-calibre, so one step up from an air rifle – verboten is because it has a pistol-grip, and it has a hand guard and a buttstock that looks like an AR. Now, the ironic part is that it has nothing to do with the calibre. It has nothing to do with the action. It is all about appearance. We're going to spend all this time and effort to make – how many? – Canadian citizens, how many Albertans criminals overnight.

A former RCMP officer told me: "You know, I served for a number of years dealing with bad guys. This isn't going to do a thing. The bad guys are always going to have guns. And what's going to happen is that all the good guys will never have them again. All you're doing is making good people into bad guys." He said: I've served all my life, been on the right side of the law, and now that I'm retired, by this gun ban, by definition of it, I'm guilty until I hand over my firearms.

Again, with the long gun registry they don't know where any of the stuff is at. They're going to jump up and down and claim victory because they got some. They don't know how much they spent on it, where it went. And those poor Canadian border and customs guys aren't getting any more cash to help them fight the bad guys, to fight the good fight.

The other one that they did, which was wild: we mentioned that the First Nations folks are exempt from this. You've actually put something that's literally a racist act. It's going back not just for the intent of sustenance; it's literally taking a demographic and setting us apart. Where have we ever done that in our history as a country? Well, not on the good side of the fence. We've progressed since then, haven't we? Or have we?

This is the wayback machine. You're seeing items that are starting to take you back to a place where we should never go. If they're already admitting that these things are used for sustenance and sport shooting, then they shouldn't have been on the list in the first place. That's one of the items of the order in council. So by definition, they're even going against their own things.

The fact that I can't have a nice cup of black rifle coffee anymore because coffee beans are bad. Those coffee beans, Madam Speaker, were made to caffeinate the most people in the least amount of time, so they must be bad, compared to Nabob, which will only get several people caffeinated. Apparently, with these ones you can get 600 coffee beans per minute coming out of it. Like, you can't make this up.

A website now is a restricted firearm. Airsoft rifles were developed over in Japan. They weren't allowed to have real firearms, so they had plastic-shooting pellet guns. Those are bad.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise in the House this evening to speak in favour of Government Motion 20. I'm pleased because I believe we have a responsibility to stand up for our constituents and their rights. At least here in Alberta there are politicians who are willing to stand up for the rights and freedoms of law-abiding citizens in the face of a federal government exercising ill-informed and opportunistic overreach during a time of global pandemic. It is utterly shameful.

The federal Liberals' gun ban simply confiscates about 1,500 models of firearms which Albertans had previously obtained and owned legally. It does nothing – and I repeat, nothing – to make us safer and protect our families and communities. Madam Speaker, these law-abiding firearm owners and enthusiasts are now expected to give up their guns. This is just craziness.

Madam Speaker, I was born and raised in the Yukon. If you want to talk about the gun registry, I can tell you with certainty that there are a number of guns in the Yukon that the federal government doesn't know exist. I promise you. I'm speaking for a friend. And I can tell you this with certainty.

As I grew up in the Yukon, there was a famous character up in the Yukon who drove around with a truck, and, you know, being parliamentary, I couldn't do the signals that he had on the back of his truck. He formed them with guns and said to the then Prime Minister: you can register this. I'll leave that to you to imagine.

Being born and raised in the Yukon . . .

An Hon. Member: Jean Chrétien?

Mrs. Allard: Mr. Chrétien was the Prime Minister at the time.

Guns are commonplace in the far north, and they are very practical, Madam Speaker. They are used for hunting, sport, and even safety. I know, safety. They are not the domain of madmen or criminals; they are the domain of the everyday person in the Yukon. I grew up with a dad and grandpa who hunted and fished. They were careful to use their guns safely. Guns were brought with us at the cabin, while we were hiking, when we were quadding, out skidooring. We had them with us everywhere for our safety and

protection. Even as kids we knew that if we were going to go up or down the Alaska Highway, we would have a gun in the car. Why? Because if you broke down, you didn't want to find a friendly bear with no gun. I can promise you that.

I, of course, support punishing those who either obtain or use firearms illegally. It's people that kill people, Madam Speaker. It's people that kill people. It's not guns that kill people, and it never has been. Criminals deserve to be prosecuted, and they should be punished to the fullest extent of the law. As a matter of fact, I would fully support increasing the law in this case, but that would require some common sense from our federal Liberal government, something that is sadly lacking at this time. That's a speech for another day.

Members of the gun community who are following the law and regulations should not be punished. Further, their legal activity of obtaining firearms should not be criminalized now at the whim of our federal Liberals. This is clear virtue signalling from Justin Trudeau's Liberals, who would prefer to target law-abiding gun owners instead of getting to the root of the problem.

In Canada the vast majority of firearms used in criminal activity are smuggled from the States. If you want to reduce crime, let's cut off the supply. Let's not take guns out of the hands of law-abiding citizens and leave them then only in the hands of the criminals. Does this sound familiar? Can anyone please tell me how preventing responsible gun owners from legally owning their firearms is going to address the problem? I would love to know, Madam Speaker. I really would.

As I said already, the vast majority of crimes are committed with illegally obtained firearms, often smuggled in from the States. Why is the federal government not making any plans to address this issue? If they were really concerned about the issue of gun violence, why aren't they taking the guns from the violent and not from the law abiding? It makes no sense. Madam Speaker, the truth of the matter is that we need to target smugglers and those who terrorize their streets with gun violence, not the legal owners of firearms for legitimate purposes. The move by the federal government does nothing to protect Canadians, it does nothing to protect my family, and it does nothing to protect my constituents in Grande Prairie.

Further, Trudeau announced that he will eventually launch a buyback program for those who bought guns that are now deemed illegal. This program is estimated to cost between \$200 million and \$600 million. It might be higher if they find that stash in the Yukon. I don't know. In essence, these guns are being paid for twice: once by the law-abiding gun owners and a second time by the taxpayers.

An Hon. Member: Sounds like Liberal policy.

Mrs. Allard: It does sound like Liberal policy, doesn't it?

How does it make sense to purchase something twice, Madam Speaker? As a business person I certainly wouldn't recommend it. Unfortunately, this is a common theme coming out of Ottawa these days, a lack of common sense. I understand that the government is perhaps coming at this legislation with good intent. At least, I'm giving them a wide swath of the benefit of the doubt here. I hope and pray that they have the best of intentions for Canadians.

But I hope they're listening because we have some suggestions for them on how to make this better, how to step back from their overreach and maybe listen to Canadians. There are so many experts and industry stakeholders that the federal government could have consulted. They still could, Madam Speaker. They could choose to do that and make a real plan to protect Canadians from gun violence. Through the advocacy of our provincial government, this provincial government who will stand up for law-abiding

citizens and outspoken stakeholders, they could reverse this egregious error and put forward something that has been well thought out, considered, and, most of all, something that offers real protection to Canadians, not criminalization of law-abiding people.

There need to be deterrents for offenders who commit acts of violence with firearms or smuggle guns into our country. "Deterrent" is simply a fancy word for penalty, Madam Speaker. Often violent criminals are released with soft sentences. What kind of deterrence is that? They are the ones that are endangering the lives of Canadians, not, for example, the people who frequent Bullets and Broadheads in Grande Prairie. That constituency – my favourite constituency – has this wonderful facility, and I spent some time there with the Premier, actually just a few months ago, and many members of this Assembly. I'm wondering when the federal Liberals are going to make that activity illegal as well. We won't be able to have any fun in that, either.

I'm proud of the work our government has done to focus on criminals and not punish law-abiding Albertans. We've established some of the strongest property rights in the country. We've amplified the voices for victims of rural crime in our justice system. We've put 400 more first responders on the ground in rural areas.

11:30

Additionally, our government has put in measures to deter metal theft. Often thieves break into properties to steal copper wire for resale. With the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act it makes it difficult for criminals to monetize these stolen materials. That's called deterrence, Madam Speaker. We didn't ask everyone to stop using copper wires so that the thieves would stop stealing it; that's what the Liberals would do. That doesn't make sense. To be frank, this act by the federal government is opportunistic and virtually meaningless. It won't have any kind of effect on public safety other than maybe the public safety of the people who are so angry about this law.

Some commentators have said that this legislation is in reaction to the tragedy in Nova Scotia just a few short weeks ago, a tremendously unfortunate tragedy. But, Madam Speaker, all but one of the guns used in that tragedy were illegally smuggled into Canada through the U.S.

God rest the souls of those murdered by this psychotic gunman, and may their families eventually be able to find some peace in their lives. After this incident many Albertans and Canadians wondered how to better protect themselves and their families from gun violence. For many, the answer does not lie with turning legal gun owners into criminals but holding the real criminals accountable.

Madam Speaker, we need to have better laws to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and crack down on illegal weapons crossing the border into Canada. I support this motion because I hope to see some legislative coherence from Ottawa regarding this issue. Again, I hope; I don't expect. I support this motion because I, too, want to protect the lives of Canadians, and I support this motion because I believe common sense must prevail. We should have the right to protect ourselves as Canadians. As our national anthem says, "We stand on guard for thee," and I hope that I always will be able to do that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any other speakers wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Government Motion 20. As I begin, I just

want to reflect a little bit on some of the previous comments made by my esteemed colleague from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. I think this is important for reference. I hear the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland refer, not just today but in many of his previous speeches, to the wayback machine. Now, I asked people sitting around me here if they knew what the wayback machine was, and the vast majority did not. I suppose that's because they are probably younger than I happen to be.

However, Madam Speaker, for those that want to understand the very, very important reference that my colleague has made, you can actually go onto Wikipedia, and the WABAC machine has its own page, with WABAC spelled W-A-B-A-C. It explains on there that "the WABAC machine was a central element of the 'Peabody's Improbable History' cartoon segment," part of the Rocky and Bullwinkle show in the '60s. Mr. Peabody, a dog, and his pet, a boy, would go back in history using the WABAC machine to important historical events. I knew that the days here would be more complete if everybody actually knew what the hon. colleague was talking about when he keeps referring to the wayback machine.

Madam Speaker, Government Motion 20 is actually important because it demonstrates that the Alberta government will not sit back and take it and accept a country, the country that Justin Trudeau leads, where law-abiding citizens can go to bed as law-abiding citizens, not do a thing, and wake up as criminals. That is exactly what is happening under Justin Trudeau's government. A friend of mine, a gentleman named J.R. Cox, that owns The Shooting Edge, a gallery in Calgary where there's a pistol range, a rifle range, all very legal, all very above board – let me just say this. The proprietor, Mr. Cox, actually has served our country as a member of the Calgary Highlanders, is somebody that deserves all of our thanks for that. No one is more qualified to safely run a sport shooting gallery and a gun shop.

Due to the unwell-thought-out, reckless actions of the federal government, they've made hundreds of thousands of dollars of inventory that's fully paid for worthless and essentially made a legal businessperson that pays taxes, employs people at a time when we need people employed, provides a valuable service, actually teaches people the safe way to own, handle, clean, store, and stay within the law while using firearms – they've made a criminal out of this person, out of a model citizen, out of a tax-paying businessperson. Government Motion 20, I think, is a good way for our government to say: this is not right; this is not something that we are going to quietly take.

It occurs to me that it is so often the case under Prime Minister Trudeau that the west disproportionately suffers. We're not the only ones that suffer. There are duck hunters, sport shooters all across Canada, but it just occurs to me that we are disproportionately suffering. I appreciate that while it's a clever bit of politics, I suppose, to create a new word that gets people excited or a new definition or exactly a phrase that doesn't have any definition, assault-style weapons, here's the problem. Military weapons, as somebody pointed out, were made illegal in Canada; I think it was in '78. The current Prime Minister has created an arbitrary definition of it, that whatever he decides it to be is an assault-style weapon. As we've heard described here tonight, in many cases it's because it has a pistol-grip. Well, I suppose the worst possible thing you would want, for somebody that owns a gun, is for them to be able to hold onto it when they're shooting. You don't want a decent grip on it. Apparently, our federal government is offended by people being able to hold onto a firearm when they have it. What could be worse?

The other thing that I would like to say about this is that this is meant to appeal, really, to people that don't know a lot about firearms, and that's unfortunate because it's the worst kind of

politics, where the Prime Minister of this great country is actually banking on the fact that a lot of people don't know about firearms. I've got news for people in Canada: whether you're here in Edmonton or in Toronto or in Montreal or Vancouver or Calgary or anyplace else in Canada, no one is going to be any safer if the Prime Minister and the federal Liberals are successful in seizing hundreds of thousands or millions of guns from law-abiding Canadians. No one will be safer, not one life will be saved, and not one crime will be prevented. Yet, essentially, by what I can only say is an intentional sleight of hand – using the language, creating a category that doesn't exist, assault-style guns – the Prime Minister, the federal Liberals are fearmongering, playing upon the ignorance of many Canadians that don't own guns, trying to make them feel unsafe now so that they can feel more safe when people's legally purchased, stored, and owned private property is seized from them. Nothing – nothing – could be further from the truth.

That is why Government Motion 20 is important. That is why I will be supporting it, and I hope all members of this House support it rather than have the legal private property of Albertans and other Canadians seized for zero public safety benefit.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

11:40

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've had a lot of fun tonight listening to my colleagues talk about guns and their experience with guns. Maybe if I could just get a quick "hear, hear" if you own or an associate of yours owns a gun.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schow: Let me get a "hear, hear" if you think those associates are criminals. That's what I thought. Now let me get a "hear, hear" from the opposite side. How many of you own guns?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schow: That's what I thought.

Madam Speaker, I've got to tell you. It is hard to control the emotions when having this conversation about firearms, primarily because on this side of the House, as you just heard through verbal demonstration, you have a pretty good idea or a pretty good sense of how they're used, some of the laws.

An Hon. Member: Pretty good.

Mr. Schow: Yeah, pretty good. I don't want to venture too far, but, you know, I think we have a pretty good understanding of how it works. Unfortunately, the members on the other side don't quite have the understanding, and a big part of this is about education.

Now, Madam Speaker, recently my daughter turned six, and I said to her, "What would you like for your birthday?" This is a true story. She said to me, "I want a mermaid, like, a toy mermaid" – I said, "Okay" – "and I want a gun." True story. And, hand in the sky, I've never been more proud of my kids than that day because she understands that guns can be fun if used properly. But I understand as a parent that to ensure that she uses it properly, I've got to teach her correct principles so that eventually, as she gets older, she can govern herself.

There are laws and there are rules in this country that allow us to do just that. That's why we have a possession and acquisition licence. You have to apply for it. Everyone has the right to apply

for a possession and acquisition licence. Not everyone is going to get one because, as my colleagues earlier stated, there is a rigorous process after taking the course. I've been through the course. In fact, shortly after my nomination in 2018 my wife and I got a babysitter for two different days, and we did the course together. It was a great bonding experience. I really encourage it for anybody, if you haven't got your PAL yet, to go and do that. It's a great chance. Now, she'll never tell you this, but between you, me, the opposition, and *Hansard*, of course, I scored better on that test than she did. It's a rare day when I can get one up on my wife. She's a very sharp individual. Anyone who's met my wife, Nicole, knows that she's sharp, but if there's a quantifiable metric like that, I will take that opportunity. I tell you: we had a great time. We both got our possession and acquisition licence.

The reality is that it's such a rigorous process, and it makes no sense to go through all of that, two full-day courses for your restricted or nonrestricted, just to go and use those firearms illegally. Why would you do that? But it's not just the money and the time commitment, because it does cost time and money to do this. There's also the personal inquiry that follows once you've gone through the course. Now, Madam Speaker, I've had doctors' exams that are less invasive than that acquisition application form.

The point is, Madam Speaker, that I'm not against having a conversation about gun laws in this country. If there is a way to eliminate gun violence that involves firearms, I want to know about it. I want to have that conversation. I want to be part of it. I think we should all be part of that conversation because we're all stakeholders there. We all have the right to take that course and apply for your possession and acquisition licence.

But, Madam Speaker, the federal government is not interested in that conversation. They're interested in pandering to their base, who have no knowledge of firearms or firearm legislation. This would be like, for example, someone without a driver's licence sitting in the back seat telling you how to drive. People who don't have a firearm, who have never held a firearm or shot a firearm, who might be afraid of firearms telling you how you should own, store, and use it and what kind of firearms you should be allowed to have: it's absurd. It's absurd.

Now, this ban also proves that Justin Trudeau and the federal Liberals are just out of touch with the firearms community. Now, I remember when they were doing their electoral reform consultations on Twitter, and I remember the Leader of the Opposition at the time saying that that was #ridiculous. I would love to know . . .

Mr. Kenney: This was here?

Mr. Schow: No. Leader Andrew Scheer at the time.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, comment through the chair, please.

Mr. Schow: Sorry, Madam Speaker. I apologize.

Their consultation process would be equally #ridiculous because they, one, will not discuss it with us. They won't tell anybody how they actually came to this conclusion of this exhaustive list of firearms that are apparently scary and should be banned. There's really no rhyme or reason why they're on there. So, again, it proves they have no idea what they're talking about.

Further to that point, on March 20, 2018, when they were trying to promote the Liberals' Bill C-71, the Prime Minister tweeted, "If you want to buy a gun, by law you'll have to show a license at the point of purchase. Right now that's not a requirement." Anybody in this Chamber who has a possession and acquisition licence knows

that that's already in place, Madam Speaker. Completely false, out of touch.

What are the real issues here? How to reduce gun violence. How do we actually get to the root of the issue? Again, it comes down to being informed. Now, I think the Liberals have failed to inform themselves on this issue, and I think the opposition have also failed to inform themselves on this issue.

Earlier today the Member for Calgary-McCall stood up and said, "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." Now, that same member said shortly after that something that was truly hypocritical and, frankly, asinine. He said: we don't need guns that fire 600 rounds in 60 seconds. True story, Madam Speaker. You just can't make that up. Again, telling me how to drive without a driver's licence. I don't know if that member has any firearms or not. I would love to find out if he does, because that kind of comment tells me that he doesn't have a clue what he's talking about.

Mr. Nicolaides: That's a heck of a gun.

Mr. Schow: That is a heck of a gun. No. What that is is a heck of a trigger finger.

The point here is: how do we address this? I'll tell you how. It's been proven how. In 2015 it was a time of great unrest in eastern Canada because gun violence in Toronto began to leak down into Windsor, down by the United States border. In response, the local police force and the Ontario Provincial Police launched project Kirby, an effort to combat gun violence and illegal gun trafficking. The result of project Kirby was a collaboration between law enforcement and border patrol on both sides of the line, which put a number of suspected firearms traffickers under surveillance. Now, project Kirby employed undercover officers, a phony business, other tracking methods, and surveillance methods. Ultimately, project Kirby was a success as it saw 10 people charged with over 110 offences following a number of raids and arrests. During these raids the operation confiscated eight illegal guns, two kilos of cocaine, and over \$80,000 in cash, and three vehicles were seized.

In the trial that followed, some truly disturbing information was revealed by one of the witnesses, Mark Dobrowski, who was a covert police agent and a former member of this illegal gun trade. He said: guns are really easy to buy here and really cheap. That's fact. Further concerning information came to light when the assistant Crown attorney said to the court in her opening arguments of the trial that the Crown's evidence will show that these individuals had connections on both sides of the border and boasted that they had access to, quote, an unlimited supply of handguns coming across the border.

Now, Madam Speaker, eight guns and a couple of kilos of blow may not seem like a lot, but with an endless supply of guns, how many were avoided by breaking up this illegal ring? How many crimes could be avoided going forward by breaking up more trafficking rings just like this? What would be the cost to the government? Can you really, as they have said, put a price on the safety of Canadians? Apparently, they can put a price on a scary gun and what that would cost: the numbers have been thrown around in the hundreds of millions. I think that is an incredible lowball on that number. You only have to revert to the long-gun registry if you want to see what they projected versus what it cost.

Canadians shouldn't be on the hook because a bunch of legal, responsible, licence-holding firearm owners are storing their guns properly, using them properly, but a couple of yahoos are smuggling guns across the U.S. border in southern Ontario. So we're all paying the price.

I'll tell you that banning guns, whether it be a small number or a whole bunch, isn't going to solve the problem of gun crime. If you want to have any cases of – you know, if you don't study history, you're doomed to repeat it. What happened when they banned alcohol? Did that stop the consumption and production of alcohol? What about drugs? Drugs are illegal in this country. Does that stop people from producing them and consuming them? No, it sure doesn't.

11:50

Madam Speaker, I refuse to believe that this move by the federal government is actually going to reduce gun crime, a problem that we have to address but in a consultative, robust manner. Unfortunately, this is far more about pandering to, as we've said a hundred times tonight, the Laurentian elite and far less about getting to the root cause. If we took even half the money, maybe even an eighth of the money that this is probably going to cost for this buyback program and put it towards more sting operations like we saw here with project Kirby, I think you'd see far more success than taking legal gun owners and turning them into criminals, because I know that if we work on education and proper enforcement and ensure that those who are actually convicted of gun crimes are put in prison for the proper amount of time and are taught a lesson, it will be a real deterrent for future illegal gun use. Instead of turning me, my colleagues, their associates – of course, not the members opposite – and my daughter into criminals, let's put the real criminals behind bars and address the real problem.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Where's a drink box, water bottle thing when you need one?

I'm concerned that if Justin Trudeau carries out his gun buyback program at an estimated cost of upwards of \$600 million, he'll be forced to waste more taxpayer dollars or print more money to pay the next terrorist. I'm wondering if the Member for Cardston-Siksika shares my concerns.

Mr. Schow: I've got to be honest with you, Madam Speaker. I failed to hear the question. I did hear the drink box, water bottle thingy, and I think that speaks to maybe the subject of the question.

You know, I spent some time in Ottawa, Madam Speaker, and I know that probably well-intentioned members there really want to deal with this gun crime thing as well, but I just don't see that the Prime Minister has the proper head on his shoulders. I'll tell you, though, that if guns were flashy socks, we wouldn't be having this problem today, and he would have the most robust gun collection on the planet. But they're not, because socks aren't dangerous, and I guess he thinks that gun owners are.

At this point in time I don't really have a whole lot else to say. What I do hope, though, is that maybe one of the members, like the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, might speak after me and simply rise and adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise tonight to support this motion.

At that point I'm going to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 16

Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 16, Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 16, Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) 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 Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment June 1: Mr. Shandro]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to Bill 16? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening to speak to Bill 16, the Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020. Well, to be honest, I would probably more aptly name this the raiding of the victims of crime fund. From what we've seen in the debates in the Legislature, I think that my colleagues in the NDP caucus have raised some very important points about the concerns around transparency on where the money is moving to in terms of, first of all, the \$5,000 benefit that previously or currently goes to witnesses of these heinous crimes. That's a really important concern to us that has not necessarily or at all been addressed by the minister, among many other questions that I will also raise.

Of course, Madam Speaker, this is not really a new strategy for the UCP. In fact, most of their announcements seem to be funded this way. Simply put, it's not fair. It's not fair to the victims of crime and the witnesses of crime who have had their lives impacted by these acts, who are being told now that they will no longer receive the current benefit of \$5,000. When we look at some of the other decisions by this government, the UCP said that they would increase policing in rural communities but have actually just told municipalities that they would have to figure how to pay for these announcements themselves. That came as a surprise to these municipalities because before those announcements were made, those conversations were had, and the municipalities believed that there was actually going to be some new funding attached to it. But, in fact, that wasn't the case.

Now, the UCP, at the same time as those discussions were happening, increased the amount of money that they were going to take from municipalities for traffic violations, funds from traffic tickets that go to these municipalities. Once again, that is on top of other cuts that this government has made to municipalities, whether it be cuts to the big-city charters in Calgary and Edmonton or MSI in general across the province. These, no doubt, Madam Speaker, affect policing budgets. We've heard these concerns from the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary specifically about cuts to MSI and how that is going to leave them in a position where they have to decide what funds they are going to cut, and something that comes up, whether we like it or not, is policing costs. It is something that this UCP government has forced onto these municipalities, and there's no other way to describe that relationship. It's something that has put a strain on the relationship between not only the big cities but municipalities across the province.

Madam Speaker, every time this government says that they plan on fixing an issue for these municipalities or within the justice system, it really seems that what ends up happening is that the government is going deeper into the pockets of these municipalities. In this instance we see this government actually going into the pockets or the funds that belong to these victims of crime. They're making this decision. Unfortunately, we aren't one hundred per cent sure where this funding is going to go; it looks like maybe to policing costs or prosecutors. Once again, because through other avenues, even though they're announcing that they're investing more, they've actually reduced the amount of money that is going to these municipalities. So it really seems like this is a raiding of the victims of crime fund to actually replace funding that they've pulled out in other circumstances.

Now, Madam Speaker, these dollars should be reinvested in supporting victims of violent crimes, not moved to other areas which really have very little to do with it. That was a conversation in 2016 from the Auditor General's report, when the conversation about the massive surplus that was in the victims of crime fund came up, that something had to be done. I would agree that something has to be done, but what we should be doing is reinvesting that money to support these victims and these witnesses of crime to ensure that they are getting the supports they need, not moving that money to somewhere less relevant.

Now, once again, Madam Speaker, we have seen massive reductions in other programs that go a long way to support communities when it comes to inclusion, education, infrastructure; these are all important issues that support the healthiness of communities. When we look at the direction of this UCP government, whether it be cuts to CIP or CFEP funding to the tune of upwards of 35 to 40 per cent, once again, this is truly going against the idea of strengthening collaboration and inclusion and education and working towards safer communities across the province.

Now, this government never campaigned on massive cuts to nonprofits in our province that support these communities, but here we are. They continue to say that new funds are being allocated to these programs. You know, they seem to think that these changes to the victims of crime fund are going to help these victims, but I really don't see, from my reading of the legislation and the comments that the Justice minister has made – we've raised a lot of questions about what is proposed in this legislation, specifically around where they're going to be moving this money to, and we've really heard very little in terms of answers from this Justice minister. So, once again, that is why we are asking that this government reconsider moving this legislation forward and, instead, refer it to a committee.

12:00

At the end of the day, we've seen over the last few days of this legislation being in place that there is much more to this conversation that needs to happen. There are organizations across the province that have come forward, six of them – and this is from a Calgary *Sun* document – being the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. There are more, but they're not listed here. Either way, there are many organizations across the province who are affected by the victims of crime fund that have not been properly consulted. They are raising those concerns to this government, but it seems to be falling on deaf ears.

That is why it is so important that we take more time to consult on this legislation because with the little time that we've had to debate on it – and, of course, this government, as it likes to do, is trying to push this legislation through as fast as they can, with very

little consultation. If proper consultation has been done from the UCP government, as they say that it has, then I would really appreciate if they table those documents. We've asked the minister repeatedly to share who he's consulted with, and we've heard very little in terms of answers; well, really, nothing.

Now, the problem is that when we look at this piece of legislation, whether we look at the changes to the amount of money that the UCP government is taking from municipalities for traffic tickets or whatever it might be, we're getting to a point where we can't necessarily take the word of this UCP at face value. Unfortunately, once again announcements come, and we find out later down the road, after, you know, very little conversation and consultation and opportunity to speak to it, that that's actually not what was going to happen. In this case, the minister talks about strengthening victims of crime. Unfortunately, that is not what's happening here. That has been brought up several times by my colleagues in the Legislature and several times by other organizations who are going to be affected by this legislation, who are accessing funds through the victims of crime fund to support members in their community. They are very concerned, and they have not heard answers from this government, which is why it is so important that we take more time to consult on this.

Now, there's no doubt, once again, that this is an incredibly important issue and that we need to do better for the victims of crime. We can work together to do that, Madam Speaker, but it starts by ensuring that these funds are there when these people need it. Unfortunately, from what we see here today, that is not the case.

Once again, on a different piece, if I read correctly – and I believe that the Member for Calgary-McCall had brought up the fact that there's a two-year restriction on receiving supports for victims of crime funding. I would have to ask: why? I think back to a decision that we made under the NDP government over the last four years, when we expanded the timelines for survivors of sexual assault to come forward. It really seems like this instance – and while we're looking at this legislation, it would be a good opportunity to expand that timeline as well. I question why the UCP government and why the Justice minister did not make the decision to extend that period of reporting. I hope that he might be able to give us answers. I think that the opportunity that we would have at committee, if this referral motion was passed, would be a perfect opportunity for these organizations to come forward and talk about why that might be a good idea and why it might be a good idea to leave that \$5,000 in place for witnesses of violent crimes, as it is currently written.

Now, questions about financial amendments through this legislation. There are talks about changing the way that the grant funding is divvied out, that was previously given to organizations, to be redistributed now to different organizations. So I have questions about: who did the government consult with to get to that point? They're saying now: oh, these organizations maybe aren't the best people to use this money to support victims of crime. Okay. Well, what conversations has the government had where they believe there are better organizations to do that? And if that's the case, then let's have that conversation. Unfortunately, in the short amount of time that we've had in the Legislature, that conversation and those questions have not been answered by this minister, which is why, once again, this legislation should be moved to committee.

We can look at other recent news documents that show the devastation that this UCP government is causing across the nonprofit sector. This is, once again, specific to an organization that is affected by the victims of crime fund or supports victims of crime. On March 10 of this year the *Edmonton Journal* reported that the John Howard Society of Alberta, an umbrella organization representing seven John Howard societies across Alberta, learned earlier this year that its \$60,000 provincial operating grant was

being axed by the UCP government. It described further that this grant made up 100 per cent of their provincial funding, a massive chunk of their overall revenue, and they were given relatively zero notice.

Now, Madam Speaker, once again, if there is a better use of this funding and if this government has come to that conclusion through proper consultation, then they need to let these organizations know. They should let the Legislature know before coming forward with legislation like this and saying: "Trust us; we know best how this money should be spent. We didn't really do any consultation on it, but, you know, somebody in the backrooms told us what we should do, and now we're going to do that." The fact is that that is not good enough, and the consultation on this legislation is not good enough. We've seen that through the conversations that have happened on social media and through news articles put forward by nonprofits in this province who have been absolutely blindsided by this Bill 16.

It's very unfortunate because we should be working together as a government and as an opposition to ensure that these organizations have ample opportunity to have their voices heard and have ample opportunity to ask questions of this government and, if they're going to have their funding pulled, ample opportunity to wind things down, as much as that really doesn't necessarily make a whole lot of sense, specifically in this circumstance. These organizations need more time, and if they're being told that their funding is going to disappear, then that conversation should have happened before this legislation was put forward. But through the news conversations that we've seen, that doesn't seem to be the case, that that's happened.

Of course, just back to the important work that the John Howard Society of Alberta was doing, providing public legal education and services for both victims of crime and people who find themselves on the wrong side of the law, all extremely important work that needs to be done. On one hand, we have grant funding for organizations supporting victims of crime being taken away and then, on the other hand, funding being cut from individuals that are being supported by the victims of crime fund. So the justice system and specifically those who have been affected by crime are having their funding taken away from all angles, and it's really through these discussions of Bill 16 and the funding cuts of grants for nonprofits: those conversations have not happened, and this government continues to blindside these people over and over again and is completely wrong – it truly is – which is why we need more time to take this to committee and have those conversations and bring those nonprofits in.

If we need to bring in the Auditor General to talk about how the money should be used, then that's a conversation that needs to happen. If there was a better use of these funds, then that potentially would have been a good time at the estimates process to have those discussions, but unfortunately this government took it upon themselves to be rid of the majority of our ability to go through the estimates process, one of the most undemocratic things that I've ever seen, of course, over my five years in the Legislature but even much before then. It seems like something that was probably recommended by Stephen Harper, I imagine.

You know, I'm very confused with the direction of this legislation. I don't necessarily see what the Justice minister is so proud of in Bill 16, to be honest, Madam Speaker. Really, at the end of the day, the most important fact is that this legislation was not properly consulted on. It did not go through the proper avenues of having those conversations with individuals that are affected by the justice system, nonprofits that are affected, municipalities that are affected, all of the above. So this really needs to have more time at committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance under 29(2)(a). I know that the Member for Edmonton-West Henday was probably just wrapping up some thoughts there, and I was wondering if he might be amicable to doing that for us here.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

12:10

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for that, Member. I appreciate the opportunity to wrap up, I suppose. There are many questions, more questions than I have time at this very moment to ask. Unfortunately, the many questions, important questions that we've asked already as an NDP opposition have gone unanswered. So I'm worried that we are going to get to a point when we're asked to vote on this legislation and we really haven't been provided the full details of what this actually means for the justice system and what this actually means for the organizations that, at this point, are in charge of ensuring that this money is going to victims of crime and supporting witnesses of victims of crime. Once again, unfortunately, we have just not heard from the Justice minister anything reassuring on those points.

Now, once again I would ask: will the grant funding allocated to community organizations be moved to this new service model? What is the plan for grant funding? If you're saying that there are other organizations that you're prepared to divvy this funding out to that are going to do a better job of the system that's currently in place, then who are those organizations, and how did you come to that conclusion? Another question, you know, wondering why the government can't just continue to fund those groups rather than these new organizations, these groups that have been working in our community for so long, who have built up these relationships with the justice system at all levels.

My third question: will these organizations now be competing with provincial funding and province service models like RAPID and ALERT for funding? Are we going to see this money once again given to prosecutors and police? If that's the case, then that's the conversation that we should be having, but this government needs to be accountable to the people that are losing funding because of that. If it is a decision to move that money because of them taking money from those funds previously, then that's something that they should be willing to admit as well.

You know, if the budget at this point, of course, is much different than the budget they presented – once again, we didn't even have the opportunity to fully debate their budget. Things have changed so much over the last two months with the pandemic, of course, but even at that time we didn't have the opportunity to ask how the pandemic is going to affect these budgets, and no doubt they have been affected. I think about, within my own ministry, how they've been affected, the concerns around making sure that tenants and landlords are able to have those conversations. Well, those discussions, as they happen through a provincially mandated board or tribunal, I suppose, for lack of better terms: those things cost money. The budget has changed extremely, and this government needs to be accountable for where this money is going.

Now, I've had people come to my office concerned previously with the current amount of the \$5,000 for witnesses to victims of crime, concerned that that number was too low. Now to talk about

actually getting rid of that entirely: that's very concerning for me. People deserve to have these funds if their lives have been significantly altered for the negative as a consequence of being a witness to these heinous crimes, and they deserve this little bit of funding. By no means is it enough to give them back what they have lost by being a witness to these things. But, once again, this Justice minister believes that they don't deserve anything at this point, or at least that's what we're seeing in Bill 16.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members still wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to amendment REF1? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate all the debate tonight that we've had in the House. I think I would move at this time to adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2) I wish to advise the Assembly that there will be no morning sitting tomorrow, June 4, 2020.

Further, Madam Speaker, if I may, I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 4.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:15 a.m. on Thursday]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

 Second Reading

 Bill 19 Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Amendment Act, 2020..... 1079

 Bill 16 Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020 1109

Government Motions

 Firearms..... 1098

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