



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, June 9, 2020

Day 28

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.

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, hon. members. Please be seated.

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: Ms Issik]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? I see the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Madam Speaker, I'm honoured to stand in support of Government Motion 20. Now, I'm not a gun owner – I don't own guns myself – but I grew up on a farm, and we did have guns. I remember that dad used to have greyhounds and his neighbour had bloodhounds, and they would chase coyotes and foxes all over the place. They were trying to kill these predators because they created a lot of problems. We used to have sheep, so that was a problem. Like, the predators can go after the sheep, the little lambs, and create a problem. They had the greyhounds and the bloodhounds for a long, long time. They also had shotguns, and they shot a few ducks along the way. He had a .22, and I used that to kill gophers. My friends would come over and – I'd call it a pastime, but they made a heck of a mess in our pasture.

So I do have some background – I'm not as knowledgeable on guns as some of my colleagues here – but of the guns that our Prime Minister is trying to ban right now, I can't tell you which ones would be relative to the guns that my dad used to own. But I can tell you that it was useful for him, and we always had some guns, and we used them for those purposes.

Over a month ago the Prime Minister of Canada said that a classification of firearms which he described as assault weapons will no longer be allowed to be bought, sold, used, and in two years' time possessed here in Canada. I don't think there was much consultation that went on with this. If there was, he'd have known that he was barking up the wrong tree. I am here to say that this is outrageous. It's an outrage to the business owners and enthusiasts that make their living from buying and selling these types of firearms in my constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster-

Wainwright and to the many farmers and ranchers who use them in their everyday lives.

I dealt with a lot of farmers when I used to have my farm-supply business, and they always had guns. There was a time when the federal government banned a certain kind of gopher poison, and the stuff that replaced it just simply didn't work. People had to get rid of the gophers somehow. Law-abiding constituents that I have been honoured to represent use these firearms for a variety of tasks. They do so in the full recognition that a firearm is a tool.

A firearm is not capable of being good or bad. These are moral designations being placed on an inanimate object, moral designations that are being placed by some unscrupulous politicians. As many grade schoolers know, an object at rest cannot move unless acted upon by an outside force. This is a fact of science that seems to currently elude not just the Prime Minister but also his primary firearms inquisitor, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. Now, you'd think he would know. His background would indicate that he should know about guns and what he's doing, but he's being told what to do.

Now, my constituents live peacefully, exercising their access to these firearms, whether it be for target shooting by the Vermilion Gun Club or getting kitted out for deer and duck season at Wildside Outdoors in Lloydminster. These responsible firearms owners are not a threat to their fellow man, nor are they, as the Deputy Prime Minister said so woefully, inherently dangerous. She was saying that gun owners are inherently dangerous, and I've heard other people say that. You know, we say this: "These are respectful people. They're not murderers." "Well, they're not murderers yet": I've actually heard that said. It's a distorted view of what gun owners are all about.

Gophers, like I was saying, on the other hand, who destroy grazing fields – they dig a lot of holes in the field – should fear these weapons. The firearms included in the ban are effective tools for eradicating these pests – like I said, that was my Saturday afternoon enjoyment – which can easily damage the legs of cattle and horses, costing farmers thousands in damage, let alone compromising and sometimes ending the life of that animal. My mom and dad also owned racehorses. You know, these animals are worth tens of thousands of dollars, and we really had to be careful. We'd go and fill in those holes that the gophers dug and did the best we could. Because they like to run, if they step in there, that's a big problem for a racehorse.

Coyotes and other such predators are a constant threat to agricultural concerns. Those who live on acreages also know the utility of having some of the very firearms now targeted by this Prime Minister. Firearms included on the Prime Minister's list are used to defend property and livestock from the ravages of predator animal life all over my constituency. I wonder: if a large predator emerged from the woods and charged the Prime Minister's children, would the Prime Minister employ his patented photo op or attempt a dialogue in order to stop the beast?

Madam Speaker, I do not wish to take up too much time, considering that I know this is an issue that so many of my colleagues and, really, so many Albertans are passionate about. I simply want to remind those speaking on this motion today about how many good, law-abiding, and responsible Albertans are going to be hurt by the Prime Minister's new order in council. Many of these Albertans are my constituents, but they're also my friends and my neighbours. They're good people, you know. They're not out to hurt anybody. They're law abiding. They need the guns. Like I said, it's a tool. That's what they're using it for. That is why I'm very pleased to have been able to speak today and pledge my support for Government Motion 20, which rejects the principles that Ottawa's latest gun grab is based on and speaks truth about gun crime in this

country and the law-abiding Albertans most affected by this irrational policy.

Gun crime in Canada, from the government's own statistics, is primarily committed by bad actors already engaged in the criminal process of buying, selling, using, and owning illegal guns, most of which come from a border with the United States that is all too porous and which the Prime Minister and his cohorts out of Ottawa seem too disinterested in actually securing.

I'll tell you another story. We have a lot of rural crime problems, and I've spoken about that here before. One of my constituents went over to see his father. He went into his house, came out, and someone was starting to steal his truck, so he wanted to stop them. Well, he got shot at. The bad guys had this gun. Another one of my constituents, a lady – again, there was rural crime going on. Her husband left to go chase these lawbreakers with a group of other people, and while they were gone, someone strolled out of their garage. It was a thief, and this lady attacked my constituent. She knocked her down, and she cut her in the back. My constituent then ran into her house, where her four young kids were. I don't know if they had guns in their house, but if the situation got desperate enough, it would have been nice to know that she could have thwarted that threat by securing herself with a gun.

7:40

Once again, Alberta and Albertans are paying the price for Ottawa's incompetence. Thankfully, we have a government in this province that recognizes that fact and is working diligently for more Alberta and less Ottawa. That's what we need to do. Albertans inherently know that guns are not bad. There are bad people, but there aren't bad guns.

Given that, I would thank you for your time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise under 29(2)(a). I had a great time listening to the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright – did I get that right? – and his remarks, particularly about taking care of the gopher problem. Now, for anybody who has not seen the problem that gophers cause in some of the grazing pastures, I'd love to say that you're in for a real treat, but it's quite the opposite if you're out there. I've rolled many an ankle walking through pastures myself, so I can only imagine the cost of . . .

Mr. McIver: Those are big ankles.

Mr. Schow: Yeah, those are big ankles, a size 15 shoe. You'd think I'd be sure-footed, but it would actually be quite the opposite out in one of those pastures.

The point is, Madam Speaker, that these gophers do cause a real problem, and they should be afraid of a good old-fashioned Ruger 10/22. I would love to hear a couple more stories or a few more anecdotes from the hon. member about some of his experiences growing up and dealing with these vermin.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: I've just got to speak more, and everyone will get it right. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yeah, it's not only pastures. I had a neat story. Again, I used to have that farm-supply business way back when it was really innovative to plant corn for silage and stuff. The guy planted it, and

we went out to take a look at the corn. Where you'd see the gopher hole, they came out and they chewed up the corn as it was coming out and over a huge area. You just can't believe it. In the end he worked it all up because he said that they just destroyed it. It was a small plot, but it was about 20 acres. It was a bit of an experiment on his part. It was amazing how much of those plants – well, it messed up 20 acres of corn just from that.

You know, we see it all the time. I bet you that sometimes pastures get worked down and don't live out their natural life largely because gophers are making too many holes and chewing up too much of the pasture, and it just becomes unmanageable. Yeah, gophers are a big problem. Guns help you control the gopher problem, especially when you don't have appropriate gopher poison to do the job, which would be simpler, but the federal government has made that almost impossible to do.

Thank you for the question.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise on Government Motion 20, that was given by the Government House Leader, to recognize that the criminal use of firearms primarily involves unlicensed individuals, often using illegally smuggled firearms, as well as to talk about Trudeau's gun grab and how we need to appoint our own chief firearms officer. These are all issues that we heard even prior to the federal government's attempted gun grab or, hopefully, failed gun grab. We'll see what happens in the coming weeks.

These are all responses that we had heard even in the election. I know that part of our campaign was standing up to Ottawa. This is a perfect opportunity for us to show Albertans exactly what we're made of, and in this case I think it's gunpowder and lead. I'm pretty excited to be speaking on this today. I would say that I'm excited to speak on this today as somebody who has been around firearms my entire life and has grown up around firearms my whole life. I would say that, you know, as a young person – I've talked about this another time in the House as well. I often referred to my old gal Lucy that I hunted with for a long time before I switched up, but she's still the best one I own, and she's a good one. I mean, I've grown up around guns my entire life, like I said. I mean, some of them are family heirlooms that have been passed down from great-grandparents and beyond and have gone through our family, and just to think that any firearms could be banned because somebody in Ottawa deemed it to look a little scary is ridiculous to me, Madam Speaker.

I was very pleased and honoured when the Premier asked me if I would chair the Alberta Firearms Advisory Committee. Last week we made an announcement that Alberta would have an Alberta Firearms Advisory Committee that would gather input from Albertans and refer that information back to the minister about exactly how we should proceed on our firearms policy here in the province.

As I said, this is part of our platform commitment to standing up for Alberta and getting a fair deal. We know how important it is for Albertans to – we know that property rights have been a very prominent issue for many Albertans, especially rural Albertans, and this is an extension of those property rights, your right to private property. What I believe the biggest issue here is is that the government seems to think that they can dictate what private citizens can own lawfully. I just have a major problem with that.

I'm really excited to get to work on this committee. I think that we'll be doing some pretty interesting work. I mean, I can't believe it even is work because it sounds so exciting, but I guess that's why we have the best job ever in this House, Madam Speaker, that we get to talk about the issues that we're passionate about and talk to Albertans about the issues that we're passionate about.

I remember a Facebook video from the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler that said, you know: if you want our guns, come and get them. I have to say that I think that's exactly how most Albertans feel. This gun grab, for lack of a better term, this order in council snuck through, was never debated. I mean, he puts these kinds of things through and doesn't debate them because I'm sure he knows – and by he I mean Justin Trudeau – exactly how unpopular they are, especially in places like Alberta and Saskatchewan, where many law-abiding citizens use guns to defend their property, especially from things like, we heard, gophers and coyotes and everything else.

I mean, farmers and ranchers put a lot of time and effort and capital into their livestock and care for their livestock very carefully. A gun in that situation is a tool, and I think that anybody who's a rancher or a farmer in this House will say that. I mean, the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika talked about, you know, snapping his ginormous ankles in a gopher hole. I mean, as somebody who's stepped in a gopher hole or, worse, a badger hole, it sucks. I mean, this is a prime example of why you'd want something to defend yourself with if you're out walking. Also, these are just pests out where we're from.

At the end of the day the federal government decided one evening to make criminals the next day with the stroke of a pen out of law-abiding people. I don't know how any member in this House can justify that. There's no process there. There was no – that's not democracy. That's tyrannical, for lack of a better word, and it's pathetic.

I know that something that really frustrates a lot of gun owners and a lot of people who have been contacting me as the chair of the committee is the verbiage used around these firearms to begin with. I know one of the biggest issues that I hear is – you know, I did a few interviews after the announcement, Madam Speaker. The most common one that was asked in every interview – I could almost predict it like clockwork – is: well, these are a different kind of guns; these are military grade assault rifles. What the heck is an assault rifle? An Armalite rifle is what AR stands for, first of all, an AR-15. At the end of the day in Canada we have a maximum of five bullets in a magazine, so things like being able to shoot, I think – what did somebody say? – 60 moves in 60 seconds, like . . .

Mr. Schow: Six hundred rounds in 60 seconds.

Ms Glasgo: Six hundred rounds in 60 seconds, Madam Speaker. I don't know how you would do that unless you are really, really, really fast and you had one of those fancy people beside you like they did in the olden days that loaded your rifle for you. Even then I don't think you'd quite get to 600 in 60 seconds. That would be pretty impressive if you could. Once again, it's just not possible because of the gun laws that we have here already.

7:50

At the end of the day this is a value judgment made by celebrities and activists and other people who are saying – you know, they're placing their morality in here and going: okay; well, this gun is black and scary and has an extra attachment on it, and it freaks me out, so we should ban it. That's illogical, and quite frankly it's just wrong. I would just invite those people that – perhaps a little bit of education would assist them in realizing exactly what's gone wrong here.

I think that at the end of the day if we as politicians or we as private citizens endorse the taking away or the confiscation of another fellow citizen's private property for no reason, like, how does that help anyone? I know I've heard a lot of people say: well, this will help keep gun crime down. How? That's my question: how? I don't know any criminal who's gone and got their PAL and their RPAL and then went to an accredited distributor, went to a gun store and asked for the licence and paid nicely and said, "Thank you, sir; have a nice day," turned around and then did these things. That's not how it works.

These guns are taken across borders. They are illegally trafficked. They're used by gangs. They're used by drug dealers. They're used by this, that, and the other person, and those instances, Madam Speaker, of course are tragic, and we don't want that to happen at all. But at the end of the day, how is taking a gun away from a rancher in Hilda going to solve that problem of huge gun crime in Toronto? It's not. How is taking a shotgun – because also Justin Trudeau has, you know, started this whole thing about assault rifles, whatever the heck those are, and then went on to start banning different bores for shotguns, so targeting duck hunters. Like, who are you saving there, besides the ducks, I guess? But, I mean, like, what the heck?

I have a really hard time wrapping my head around this because it is so clearly illogical. Once again, I go back to my point. They're talking about how a gun looks instead of what it actually does, and the fact of the matter is the calibre of a lot of these, quote, scary guns is the same if not less impactful than some of the guns that aren't even banned, but I'm scared to say that too loud because then Trudeau is going to turn around and take away .270s and all kinds of stuff like that.

You know, it's crazy to think that this could even be happening in a country like Canada, in a place that we call home. We have such a rich history of hunting and farming and ranching and enjoying the outdoors as families. I know that for us the most exciting time of the year is November, Madam Speaker, because November is rifle season. I mean, bow season is exciting, but it's not nearly as exciting as rifle season, and it's a lot slower, longer days in bow season. There's a lot more walking involved, so we like rifle season a heck of a lot more. You know, it's just a really fun time with my family.

Some of my best memories I have of me and my dad or my uncles and I or my cousins and I are bopping around the truck in a field or running down a coulee, or trying to figure out how we're going to get over the fence fast enough because there's a whitetail running across the valley and you've just got to get him or whatever. Like, it's an adrenaline rush. It's fun. It's enjoying the outdoors. It's practising conservation.

You learn so much by doing that, and then for the government to come in and start with what they call scary guns, I just don't know where that line ends, Madam Speaker. I think that's what scares me the most. Once you start to erode these property rights, when are they going to end? I think that's what a lot of rural Albertans are saying. You know, I don't think a lot of Albertans, including myself, have a whole lot of trust in Ottawa right now and Justin Trudeau. He's kind of lost – not kind of. He has no ground to stand on on this, and at the end of the day if what he's trying to do is win a seat on the security council, well, that might work, I guess. Whatever. But he shouldn't be taking away the property of law-abiding citizens.

I think that the crux of this issue is the word "law-abiding." These are people who have done nothing wrong, for all intents and purposes. These guns, for example, could be on a shelf somewhere. They could be virtually unusable. They might not have been fired in 10 years, for heaven's sake. Like, they're probably sitting in a

gun cabinet somewhere, locked up appropriately, trigger-locked and everything. Some people probably don't even know they're there, for example, or, you know, they're not really anything they think about, or they've been passed along. Or they have some kind of attachment to them because it was their great-grandpa's, but they only got their PAL or their RPAL or whatever, so they could have that possession of it when it was coming through the ranks or coming through the family. But now they're being told that their family's heirloom will have to be given up because Trudeau thinks that he can buy that kind of memory. I don't know.

At the end of the day it's not just, like, a piece of property, even, it's not even just – those are memories that you make with your family. I mean, these are important tools in rural Alberta, but it's also property that you've legally obtained. I don't know. I'm sure some genius on Twitter will probably clip this and have some things to say, and, you know, I'll have to make another video and whatever else. I mean, whatever. If they want to do that, be my guest. Like, at this point, I mean, we're – what? – a year in, and I'm pretty used to it, so bring it on, I guess.

This is an issue that – I firmly believe it's easy to stand up for the stuff that you believe in, and, Madam Speaker, I believe in this, so there's no way that I'm backing down on this. Albertans can be assured that the firearms advisory council will not be backing down, either.

We'll be hearing from a swath of Albertans. The representation on the firearms advisory council is quite extensive. We have athletes and members from hunting associations as well as private citizens and people who own gun shops, people from all different walks of life, as well as the Member for Central Peace-Notley and the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, who all have very different perspectives on this. I mean, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, he's pretty much the gun encyclopedia. Like, I don't really know what there is that he doesn't know. I wish he was here so I could tell him to his face because he would probably laugh, and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I must caution you on mentioning who may or may not be here in the House at a particular time.

Ms Glasgo: Oh, right. I meant that in the best way, Madam Speaker, but I understand. I'm sorry. I apologize.

The Member for Central Peace-Notley has had an extensive career and I believe enjoys hunting just as much as I do if not more. I mean, I've never seen a guy with so much wildlife on his ties before. It's really cool. I just think we have a really stand-up crew that's taking this issue to Albertans and will be engaging on this.

I have to say that I'm very excited to get started, and, like I said, I can't believe that this is my job. If you would have told me that this is what I was going to be doing this year two years ago, I would have said: yeah, right. I wouldn't have even thought I would be elected. This is just such a cool job that we get to do, and it's such an honour to even stand in this place, let alone get to be passionate about the issues that we all care about the most. This among other things has just been a real treat for me.

But I do want to go back to the chief firearms officer as well. This was something that I'm getting a lot of feedback about personally as the chair. People have been coming to me saying, you know: "What is this going to do? How is this going to help?" I do know that this is a commitment of our government, and I'm very glad to see us sticking to it because having a chief firearms officer will help assert more autonomy over Ottawa. It will help us to have a made-

in-Alberta solution for an Ottawa-created problem, which I think is the case in a lot of situations here in Alberta, especially lately.

I would encourage all members of the House to look at the facts in this situation. I know that sometimes facts can get in the way of a good argument, especially on a certain side of the House, but I would encourage our opposition members to join with us in respecting the private property rights of legal firearms owners and call on the Justin Trudeau government to give the money that he's planning to spend on an ill-conceived buyback program to actually policing the borders, perhaps, or maybe he could look at smuggling rings. Perhaps he could deal with trafficking. Perhaps he could actually crack down on drug crime and gangs and everything else. But no: that won't get you a seat on the UN Security Council, so let's go after a gun with the same calibre as smaller guns that you use to shoot an elk. Like, for heaven's sake. At least just be consistent, but we won't see that.

You know, I really hope – I wouldn't guess how a vote in this Assembly is going to go, Madam Speaker, because that would be inappropriate. What I would say is that I hope – I know the last motion that we put through about firearms, the opposition stood with us.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity. I was just listening quite intently to your speech there, and I was just wondering if you could comment. I noticed that you mentioned the excitement of getting out and being part of the hunt as a young woman.

I've noticed a lot of that up in my area as well, that it's becoming a very, very big sport, not only hunting but trapping as well. Young girls, 12, 13 years old are going out with their dads and, you know, spending a week out on the traplines and going on weeklong hunting trips and really, really getting into it, to the point where there's a family up in the Glendon area that actually has a video hunting show that's been put out that's very, very popular. We're getting a lot of recognition world-wide, and the young women in the family are a very big part of that. I'd just like you to kind of comment on the availability and the opportunities for young women to get involved and get out and enjoy the outdoors. Hunting is a big part of it, and shooting isn't all of it. Getting out and enjoying the outdoors is a big part of it as well, but, you know, connecting with dads and uncles and all that kind of stuff is a great opportunity. I just thought you might want to expand on that a little bit. You mentioned quite often scary guns, and I'll tell you what, the scariest gun, no matter what calibre it is, is when it's pointed at you when you don't have one. Carry on.

8:00

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Wouldn't want to forget to say St. Paul. Like I said, I don't remember a time where we weren't taking part in some form of the hunting process, whether that was actually going out and harvesting the game ourselves or whether that was making sausage or plucking geese or whatever. Like, it's a family affair in our family, and everybody from my grandma to my dad to my little cousins is at our house when we're making sausage and things like that. Like I said, it's a family affair in our house.

My fiancé was never really part of a big hunting family, but he even got to take place in his first sausage-making extravaganza, and he couldn't believe the machine that we had going on. We bought

this electric press, and I was telling my dad that, you know, I remembered the days that I had to hand-crank that thing. It was only five pounds, and we do about 200 pounds of sausage every year. One arm would get a really good workout, and then you'd have to have a really good nap after.

I think the hon. member asked me a question about how it is to be a woman in this kind of a space, and I would say that it's the same as a guy. I mean, at the end of the day, I think there's – I mean, there are obviously fewer women who have been hunting historically. It's kind of been a boy's game or a man's game, but there are a lot of women that I know who are involved in hunting and are better shots than some of the guys because they're more patient, I guess. I don't know. I'm not going to make a judgment like that, but my dad always says that. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning nodding. Yeah. We are more patient.

My dad: I asked him one time because he always said that, you know, he always wanted sons. Like, he always had this dream about having sons and taking them hunting. I said: "Dad, what would you do? Like, would you have done anything different?" He said, "Nah; I raised you like boys." Nothing changed. We all just went out together. I mean, the deer doesn't care if you're a man or a woman shooting at it. At the end of the day, it's just what's ethical and what's a good shot, and what you are going to do properly.

I mean, I've had the honour of – I've gone moose hunting and all different kinds of deer and elk so far. I really want to go turkey hunting. That's my bucket list item. I would love to go turkey hunting, but that's a really long draw, so hopefully I get it one day.

I know this is just a really exciting time for my family and especially for the girls in the family because it is something that sets you apart sometimes. Maybe there aren't a lot of girls in the game, or there aren't a lot of women who are out and hunting and taking that time with their family, but for us it's the thing that brings us together every year regardless of whether it's busy in the oil field or whether it's slow or whether somebody's working long hours or whether you get elected or not. It's just that time that we can all spend together as a family.

I have to say, Madam Speaker, that it's been a true joy of mine to be able to enjoy the outdoors with my family. It's something that I'll definitely pass on to my family as well when I'm blessed enough to have my whole gaggle of children. We'll be a brigade by that time. Hopefully, Justin Trudeau doesn't take away all our guns by then, but I have to say that I'm just so proud to be part of a government that's even bringing an order like this forward and standing up for families like mine, standing up for families like a lot of the people in this Chamber.

With that, I will cede the rest of my time.

The Deputy Speaker: Very good timing.

Any other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 20? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure, an absolute pleasure to stand and speak again to Government Motion 20. I think it's a very, very important motion, that's been put forward by one of our hon. members because he understands the importance of this to our community and especially rural Albertans.

You know, my family: on the land that I live on, with the birth of my grandchildren we're now six generations up there. My great grandparents homesteaded up there. My grandparents lived there. My parents lived there. Now I'm on that land as well. I can tell you that over time, having a gun was a necessity. It was part of life, especially for my grandparents. It was part of survival. When they first started homesteading and didn't have a lot of crops and access

to grocery stores, it was very important to be able to hunt for your own food. It's something that we've grown up with.

I talked briefly during 29(2)(a) last week about how I grew up with guns and grew up with gun safety. We were taught that from a very young age. I started out with a pellet gun. Like I said before, the most dangerous part about that gun was the amount of lead that it left laying around the countryside, because we used it a lot and we target-shot with it and all kinds of things.

But I also mentioned the fact that this bill, that was put forward by Mr. Blair – on April 20 he came out with a statement that he wants gun control as quickly as possible. This is right in the middle of the COVID-19 outbreak, and I think the Prime Minister made a comment that same day that they had full intentions of bringing this forward, but unfortunately they were blocked by COVID-19. So this is something that the Liberal government has been trying to put forward for a long time.

The biggest issue with the whole thing is that they don't know anything about guns, and it's obvious by the way they've put this forward. Assault style: now I'm going to give you some examples. One of their favourite guns to attack is the AK-47. Well, the AK-47 is a style of weapon used by the military, but it's also a style of weapon that is replicated in many, many forms. I'll give you a couple of lists here, AK-47 assault-style. You can actually buy a water gun for playing water fights in the backyard AK-47 style. You can buy a paintball gun and use that to go out with your friends and neighbours or business acquaintances and have a good time, have paintball war games out in the bush at different places. You can rent these things, and they're AK-47 style, and they shoot paintballs at you. You can get a BB AK-47 or a pellet rifle AK-47. You can even buy an airsoft AK-47 rifle. My whole point is that an AK-47 style weapon is no more an assault weapon than if you dressed Justin Trudeau up in a Superman costume and expected him to be Superman. It's about as realistic, okay?

The whole premise that they're following here with using that word "assault-style" is absolutely ridiculous. It does absolutely nothing to curb the illegal importation of guns or the illegal sale of guns. I'm just going to read you a couple of things here. The Liberals' ban does nothing to address the illegal smuggling of these guns from the United States into Canada. Back in 2018 public safety minister Bill Blair, while discussing gun control in a CBC interview in July, said: criminals already operate outside of the law in the way in which they acquire these guns; they're often stolen or illegally diverted or smuggled in from the United States. This is our federal safety minister back in 2018 talking exactly against the type of legislation that he's planning on putting in place.

We know that an overwhelming majority of firearms criminally used in Canada are smuggled in illegally from the U.S. Instead of addressing this, Ottawa will instead spend vast sums of money to criminalize law-abiding Canadians. That money would be far better used to pursue the smugglers and drug gangs that plague our society. That's not being done by the federal government, Madam Speaker, even though the public safety minister called it an issue.

Back in 2012 then Toronto chief of police Bill Blair, same guy, told the *Toronto Star*:

Our research into the weapons that we seize tell us that about 70 per cent – the number has been remarkably consistent over time – are smuggled across the border from the United States. The other 30 per cent of those guns are being stolen or diverted from legitimate . . . owners here in Canada.

This is the same guy, our federal safety minister, that wants to put in this legislation to take legal guns away from law-abiding citizens here in Canada, and in two instances, 2012 and 2018, he's actually spoken out against his own legislation.

8:10

The people that are smuggling those guns aren't necessarily the ones who are using them. So they are trafficked to young people at a significant premium in cost because that's one of the reasons they do it, to make money. People can buy an illegal gun as much as they can buy other contraband material, etc. and so they're trafficked by individuals and some of these guns are shared among groups who are involved in a common enterprise. There's even... some suggestion that some of these guns are being rented out for short periods of time to individuals.

This legislation is going to do nothing to curb that kind of activity.

It's actually very rare that someone would bring a large shipment of guns into the community. It's actually coming in twos and threes, where somebody throws it in the trunk of [a] car or under their front seat. . . . You can't prevent all that contraband material from coming (across the border) and people are motivated to do it because there's a profit. I wish people understood the human cost of that profit.

These are the words of our current federal safety minister. These are words out of his mouth back in 2012.

And now he said: my intention is to bring forward that legislation as quickly as possible. Kind of a flip-flop from this federal government. Also, Mr. Blair said in 2012, after the Eaton Centre shooting: I respect the right of people to own guns. Same man again. So there's definitely been a flip-flop in his attitude. Let me rephrase that, Madam Speaker. The public safety minister who's implementing this gun ban said: I respect the right of people to own guns. Now, eight years later he doesn't respect that right.

Now, I've had folks out to my property. I've got land, and I have a little shooting range set up with targets. It's really good to get kids out there to give them a safe place to be introduced to guns. I often will start with talking about the different calibres and the difference between rimfire and centrefire rifles and the difference between a rifle and a gun, which is a shotgun. Then, you know, we start off with the small stuff, a pellet gun, and set the target up so they can take a crack at it. When they're comfortable with that, we move up to the .22 and then on to my personal favourite, which is a .17 calibre, which is a kind of a long-range, high-velocity gun that's very, very accurate. The kids really get a thrill out of that because it's got a big bang but it doesn't kick at all, right?

It gives them the exposure, but at the same time, you're teaching them gun safety, and it's always very important. I've got a little shack set up there, and, you know, whoever is out there – before anybody is allowed into the shack to do any shooting, everybody else is standing behind. It's all very controlled. Those are the kinds of things that kids need. They need that experience, and if we don't have access to those guns and that, they have to pick one up off some kid in high school or after high school, and if that's their first experience with it, that'd be devastating. We need to control and respect responsible gun owners.

I've got a couple of businesses in my area, Sylvestre sports in Bonnyville, Warehouse Sports in St. Paul. These folks are very reliant on the sale of guns, and this federal gun ban is going to not only penalize ordinary folks that want to own and collect. They're not all hunters, Madam Speaker. Some of them are simply gun collectors, and some like to just take their guns out to the firing range. We have a couple of good ranges in the area as well, very well utilized. Folks go out there, and they can share. One guy has got one particular type of rifle, and somebody out there has never shot that one before, and they want to take a crack at it. You know, these guys are very willing to work together. It's all done in a very safe, controlled manner, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with it. It's a sport.

As well, as the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat said, you know, a lot of times it's a family thing. I remember many times going out on weeklong hunting trips with buddies and a good brother-in-law of mine, and we very much enjoyed it. You got up early in the morning, and you went out hunting, and you met back for lunch. Sometimes you got lucky and got an animal, and sometimes you got skunked and went home without one, but it was all in good fun and everybody enjoyed themselves. These are the kind of things – and, like I said when I was opening, this is a big part, and it's been a big part of my family for six generations on our land.

I would hate for somebody like Bill Blair, who has shown that he's wishy-washy on the subject from his statements in 2012 and 2018, to now come in and say that he's going to get this done as quickly as possible when I don't think he even knows what he's talking about, when I look at some of the words that have come out regarding assault-style weapons. Military assault rifles are illegal for common ownership in Canada and have been for a long time. This is going to do nothing to stop that. What we really need to be focused on is the smuggling of weapons in from the United States over our borders. The federal folks know about it, and the RCMP know about it. They know where they're coming from, and they know the most common places that they come across. They need to deal with those things instead of making criminals out of everyday Albertans. That's exactly what they're doing with this.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 15 Choice in Education Act, 2020

Member Irwin moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

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

[Adjourned debate on the amendment June 3: Ms Issik]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 15? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to the amendment on Bill 15, the Choice in Education Act, 2020. The amendment, I believe, is moved by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I think it's fundamentally something that we should be supporting in this House because we've talked at length when we were speaking to the main bill. I believe some of my colleagues now who've spoken to the amendment as well – we've spoken at length as to how this is basically a farce, right? It's a bill that doesn't actually introduce any of the changes or doesn't actually move forward any of the things that this government purports to want to do. We see that this is actually an attack on publicly funded education. We see that this bill actually does not support publicly funded education. We see that this bill actually does not support parental choice in education. We see that this bill does not actually support the ability of families to have the supports they need throughout the education system.

We see this as a pattern from this government, right? We see this as a pattern of behaviour. We see this as something that the government seems to want to move forward every single time they try to bring anything to this House. We see it when they cut funding to PUF students. We saw thousands of students lose their educational support structures. We saw thousands of students across schools that are publicly funded in public core separate school systems, Madam Speaker. We saw all of that disappearing, and what that actually resulted in is fewer opportunities for those students. It results in fewer opportunities for families. It results in less choice for those parents.

I think it's certainly something that when we look at what this government has done historically and then in the last year here and when we look at what the government is proposing today and proposing as they move forward, it certainly looks like they're actually trying to bring in this sort of American-style, private education system that doesn't really support our students. It doesn't really support our families in this province. Certainly, I think it's something that the government is trying to do to justify these devastating cuts to education and attack the systems where the majority of the students receive their education.

We talk about how this government brought in this engagement, this massive survey with all these responses and everything. Of course, I spoke at a little bit of length and my colleagues have spoken at a little bit of length as well to how it wasn't statistically significant, right? It wasn't statistically sound. The analysis was quite poor. Indeed, I hope the government can talk to some of their statisticians and understand that and understand why self-selected surveys won't be able to provide that key engagement, provide some of that key information on to the effectiveness of this bill.

We can also see, when we look at the engagement document the government put forward and how families were engaging with the education system, how students were engaging with the education system, that the majority of families don't actually support this proposal, right? They don't actually want this privatization of education. They don't actually want this Americanization of education. We can see pretty clearly that the majority of families – I believe it's over 90 per cent of families – are in a publicly funded system. So they're in a system that is in either the public or separate schools. Here in Edmonton, for example, that could be Edmonton public or Edmonton Catholic.

8:20

We see that these systems were providing adequate amounts of choice. They were providing adequate amounts of supports. They were providing adequate programming for the majority of students in Alberta. Instead of supporting those programs that are already existing, already in place, and provided this great opportunity and great services for so many families, this government has decided to defund the majority of those services, take away many of those opportunities, take away that choice, take away the programming. That's really devastating for students, for example, with special needs, right? It's really devastating for families that count on these programs every single day to make sure their student can make it through class. It's devastating for families who are depending on – right now during the pandemic, Madam Speaker, when many students are at home and many teachers are trying to teach remotely, it's devastating for those teachers and those students who no longer have the one-on-one support because those EAs were cut.

That's the type of thing that I think this government doesn't understand when they talk about how they want to bring in all this massive choice in education, they want to bring in this bill here, this Bill 15. I think our amendment really speaks to how the goals of the bill are not met at all by the legislation that's being proposed, right?

Instead of actually accomplishing any of the things they are trying to propose, what they're actually doing is taking away those supports for the majority of families. Over 90 per cent of families will no longer see as much support. They will see less funding for students. They will see fewer services in their classrooms. They will see fewer educational assistants. They will see bigger class sizes. That's just a reality of what happens when this government defunds education, when this government tries to privatize and Americanize our education system, when they try to bring in this sort of system that has been shown to not be effective across the majority of the world.

Almost nobody except for the Americans uses this style of education. We see that the best outcomes, including those that were here in Alberta, and I hope will continue here in Alberta, Madam Speaker, were through these publicly funded education systems and through strong public funding of education providing these opportunities within the publicly funded education system, the public and separate systems. Instead, what we're seeing in supporting these teachers, supporting these families, supporting these students, instead of seeing those types of supports, instead of seeing this government actually go out and say, "We believe in educating our future generations," instead we're seeing this devastation of the supports. We're seeing this lack of funding. We're seeing funding instead going to schools, for example, that will have the right to refuse any student they want for any grounds. That's what this bill is actually bringing forward. It's increasing funding to schools that could refuse students access, right?

When the government talks about how they want to support choice in education, what they're actually doing is saying that they want to support choice for a very, very few. They want this American-style system where the richest will benefit and the rest will have to suffer, right? That's not what we've seen across the world as a strong education model. Instead, what we see across the world is publicly funded education, whether it's in the public or separate systems here in Alberta and across Canada or the more effective models of bringing choice and effective education to families. It is more effective at providing the outcomes that we're looking for, which are things like literacy and numeracy, Madam Speaker.

When we talk about this bill, when we talk about the types of models that this government is trying to bring forward, it becomes very clear that this amendment is needed because none of the outcomes that are being proposed, increasing the choice for families, are actually going to happen for the majority of Albertans. Now, the government is right. There may be a select few where that does work for them. Madam Speaker, it so happens that I think some of those select few will turn out to be very wealthy friends and donors of many of the members across the way. That's unfortunate. I think that we should be fighting here to make sure that we have a strong education system that works for everybody. We shouldn't be fighting for an American-style education system that only works for the wealthiest few. I think that's something that's very unfortunate.

I think our amendment speaks to that. I think the amendment that my hon. colleague here has brought forward speaks to that. I think that it's something that we need to understand because when we look at who we're trying to support with education – right? – what we're trying to achieve, we should be saying that the vast majority of students, over 90 per cent of students, need these services. They need to have the best possible opportunities. They need to have all the choice to make those choices within their schools, within their school systems, within the publicly funded systems and have those outcomes.

Instead of actually moving forward with that and saying that over 90 per cent of students need support, this government seems to be looking out for the very few, right? It seems to be looking out for this American-style system because – I don't know, Madam Speaker. But it certainly seems like only the wealthy friends and donors of the government here will be able to attend these choice schools. We know that some of the schools that they're proposing to fund and increase funding for while decreasing funding for publicly funded education – they want to increase funding for schools that will have the opportunity to deny access for any student for any reason that they want.

Schools that this government is proposing with this bill to increase funding for will have the right to say: "No. We don't want your student because they have too many difficulties. Their numeracy isn't good enough. Their literacy isn't good enough. We don't like your family. We don't like the neighbourhood your family lives in." Whatever it is, Madam Speaker. That's the actual proposal this government is bringing forward, that these schools have the right to make those decisions, those adjudications on families, against families without any input, right?

I don't believe that we should be encouraging this behaviour. I think that every single student, every single family deserves to have a strong education. No matter where you live, no matter who you are, you deserve to have an education that provides you with the skills you need to excel at life. Madam Speaker, I think that's something that is fundamentally what we should all be here striving to do. I know that members of the opposition here – that's why my hon. colleague introduced this amendment. I know that it's why we fundamentally are fighting to make sure that we support our students and we support our schools and we support our education system.

Instead, Madam Speaker, we see a government who seems to be at every step of the way either fighting with the teachers or the families, right? They either want to defund the families and the support services for those families, or they want to take away the pensions and attack the pensions of the teachers. No matter where we are, this government seems to be trying to reach in and actually attack the publicly funded education system, attack the people working and using the publicly funded education system, take away those supports, take away those services, take away the funding, take away the retirements and all of those programs.

Instead of doing what this bill says, which is to increase the choice in education, it takes away, for the majority of students, the supports and their choice. It takes away from the majority of students in this province the ability for them to go out and actually learn effectively. It actually makes, in the majority of cases because the majority of students are in these publicly funded education programs, their education worse. Again, what this government is actually proposing is to allow a wealthy, select few to succeed more because they happen to have privilege. That's actually what this government is proposing with this bill.

I think this amendment is essential and needed because we shouldn't be moving forward with legislation that doesn't accomplish the goals that are in the title, the Choice in Education Act, 2020. Obviously, it doesn't accomplish these goals, because this government has made a pattern of trying to dismantle our education system, right? This government has made a pattern of trying to dismantle our ability to have functional education systems that so many students use every single day.

I mean, it's pretty clear, because when we talk about choice in education, we know that there is programming that sometimes is difficult for some students – right? – and that's why they do need specialized supports. That's why some students need different types of streams or different supports, individual supports in some cases,

Madam Speaker. That's important. One of those streams is often home-schooling, home education. I know that many of my friends, and I believe some of my colleagues even here, have students who were home educated. I know people that have worked for us in the past who've had students that were home educated. It's not uncommon to have home education across this province.

I want to say that absolutely I support that approach, particularly when some families feel it is the best choice for their family, but one of the things that this bill brings forward is that it reduces the oversight for home education. It takes away from the ability for us to know what's actually being taught in home education. I think that's particularly concerning as well because we know that it's important that these families receive supports. We know that it's important that these families that choose to do home education and choose to educate their child at home have things like curriculum, have things like guidelines on how they should be teaching and what they should be teaching. We know that it's important that these families are able to provide their students with a successful knowledge base to go out into the world.

That's the goal for every single student. It doesn't matter what school you're in in this province, right? It doesn't matter if you're in a publicly funded school, if you're in a private or charter school, or if you're in a home-school here, Madam Speaker; the goal is to provide this standard and successful skill set to use in the real world, and this bill takes away all that. This bill, instead of actually trying to do that for every single student, makes it harder for people to get into the schools they want, it reduces supports for schools with publicly funded programs, it allows schools to deny entry for individual students for any reason whatsoever, and then it goes in and says: "Well, actually, we don't really care what people are teaching, either. We don't really need any oversight in the actual curriculum portion."

Those are all very shocking things, right? I think those are all very surprising things. I think it's pretty clear that when this government proposes this bill, it's not actually about improving choice in education. It's not actually about improving accessibility in education and improving student outcomes. Instead, what this government is trying to bring forward, it appears, Madam Speaker, is the dismantling of our education system, this dismantling of our ability to provide education.

I know that my colleague here from the Conservative government – I forget his riding, Madam Speaker – even compared publicly funded education to liquor stores. That's what this government is actually proposing. They're saying that because we have private liquor stores in the province, we should also have private education in the province, that we should privatize and Americanize education. My hon. colleague across the way actually said that in this place, Madam Speaker. I'm not making this up. It's shocking when these are the types of comparisons that the government members are trying to make, right? We know that providing education, providing quality education is very different than providing liquor to people across the province.

8:30

When we look at the outcomes we're trying to achieve, when we look at the goals we're trying to achieve, when we look at the stated outcomes of the minister in terms of supporting students, it becomes pretty clear that the actual clauses of this bill don't accomplish that. Instead, I believe we shouldn't read this a second time. I believe that we do need to actually look at how this government is approaching the whole perspective of education, how this government is approaching their policies in education and their funding in education. I think that this bill should not move forward – right? – because this bill very clearly does not accomplish those

goals. It's very clear that members of the government do not want to accomplish those goals. We see that in the very things they are saying in this place.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise under 29(2)(a) and speak a little bit about some of the member's comments. The Member for Edmonton-South spoke at length about his concerns about Bill 15 and the reasons he supports the amendment now before us to not now read the bill a second time. I think his eloquence is well known in this House, and on this matter the Member for Edmonton-South is quite outspoken and well versed in his knowledge of the bill and how indeed, as he says, it does not do what, in fact, it purports to do in its title. Therefore, for a number of reasons detailed by him in his address, he spoke about not proceeding with second reading at this time.

I was wondering if indeed in his address he might bring further illumination on more, I guess, localized arguments with respect to schools in his constituency or constituents that he may have spoken with who feel that this threat that he speaks about, threat to public education, is a reality to them in their particular life and with their families as they look to occupy schools that were built under our past government's direction, public schools, I might add, that their children will attend and hope to continue attending while the Edmonton public school board, in fact, for one, attempts to accommodate many of the applications made by parents for special types of schools or charter schools, that they be incorporated into those public school systems and into those schools that might be in the hon. member's neighbourhoods. I'm just wondering if there are examples that he could provide the House of constituents that certainly recognize this threat to the public education system and see the bill for what it is, a way of starving the public education system of oxygen.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah. I'd like to thank my colleague for the questions here. I think it's really important because there are particular services that are under attack, and there are particular effects that we're going to be seeing. For example, there's a school in my riding – it's a Catholic school, so it's a separate school here in Edmonton – that did have an in-house or in-school counsellor, right? It was a registered psychologist, who was able to provide counselling services for students and able to provide mental health supports and other types of supports for students. We know it's a K to 9 school. As students go through the K to 9 system, it's a very challenging time for many students, and there are a lot of things happening either at home or at school or changes in their bodies, and the support of something like a psychologist would be and can be very successful.

Now, instead of being able to actually continue that support, Edmonton Catholic schools will have to discontinue that service, right? Students across my riding and families across my riding will no longer have access to these supports, and directly because of the cuts by this government, directly because of the decrease in funding by this government they will no longer be receiving these supports.

We talk about the types of services that our publicly funded schools, our separate and public schools, were providing here in the province and the opportunity they were providing for students. It was quite substantial, right? They were providing things like

individualized EA supports for students. I know I've heard from parents and families with students with special needs, who perhaps were even diagnosed quite late in their education, after the third or fourth grade even in some cases. For these students that require additional support and require that one-on-one, individualized time and even now require individualized time during the pandemic, when they're working from home and learning from home, those supports would no longer be available, right?

When we talk about these families and the students that receive the supports, the families had chosen to use these publicly funded schools because they have these great supports. What we see instead is this bill taking that away. We see this bill instead saying: well, the wealthiest few can have those services but nobody else. That's fundamentally what's wrong with this bill, and that's why this amendment, I think, is such a good amendment. It's fundamental because when we talk about the services that every Albertan should receive, when we talk about the education that every single student and every single child should receive, we're talking about this wide spectrum, right? Not every student will need the same supports. That's okay, and that's expected. Every single child learns at a different pace and needs different services.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak on amendment RA1 to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I much appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this amendment. I haven't had a chance to speak to this bill at all because of the cancellation of morning sessions over the last little while when I was on duty, so I'm quite happy to be here this evening, when I can address the need to take this bill out of this House and refer it back for serious review.

I'm very concerned about the intention of this bill, and I think it's important for us to talk about a number of thematic issues in terms of the nature of public education in a democratic society in looking at the intention of this bill. It isn't that long ago in the history of this part of the world, particularly if you go back a little bit – England, for example – that public education was not widely available. It was a time when there was a significant amount of poverty and inequality in society in Britain. There were a number of great reformers who came along who came up with this bold idea that education is not something merely for the wealthy, as it was in the class system that existed in Britain at the time, that education is for everyone. The idea was bold because, in fact, at the time some people believed that education was wasted on the poor, wasted on the lower class, that they couldn't learn, that there was no benefit in terms of their going to school, largely because there was no hope for them to do anything but menial labour anyway, so why is it that you would want to educate them?

Now, of course, thank goodness, reformers came along and said that these were very deep misconceptions about humanity and that simply having been born into the wrong class did not preclude your ability to be a learner and to be a productive citizen who would contribute in great ways to the democratic experiment that Britain was engaged in at the time and had spread throughout the world, including to Canada. A big part of establishing this democracy in Britain was having an educated populace that could understand the system, could inform themselves about the issues, and could use that education and that background to inform their decision about who they would elect in a democracy.

8:40

A good public education system is intimately tied to a successful democratic society. All of us here in this House benefited from both

of those things. I think that, you know, wherever you were going to school in the province of Alberta over the last, whatever, 50 years or 100 years, you probably got a pretty decent education, one that gave you the wherewithal to be here today to contribute to this great practice of democracy that we have in spite of the fact that perhaps your parents themselves didn't have education. Perhaps they didn't have a lot of money. Perhaps they didn't have opportunity, or, worse, perhaps your parents were not very good parents, parents struggling with alcohol or drug abuse or violent tendencies.

In spite of all that, you were given an opportunity. In spite of whatever circumstances you may have been born into, because we had a public system that ensured that every child had access to the resources that are available to all the other children in society, there was at least a chance that whatever background you came from, you would be able to rise beyond that background to become a happy, contributing member of society. That's the underlying notion of a public education system, that truly democratic belief in the value of all citizens. I think that's the thing that we're concerned about on this side of the House.

The public education system is fundamental to how we see ourselves as a nation and fundamental to how we see ourselves as demonstrating and exhibiting the values of justice, of equity for all, and opportunity for all, and as we begin to approach the defunding of that public system, we have to be concerned about the significant consequences that that is going to have on our larger society.

Now, I have nothing against parents having a choice as to the school that their kids go to and the types of things that are done in those schools, but there are different ways in which that can occur. Now, in Edmonton, for example, it was determined that there was a need for schools that taught languages other than English in the years I was growing up, so the school boards began to introduce programs with many different languages. Of course, the predominant one is the French language, and we have actually moved to the place of having a French school board in the province of Alberta. We see choice within the public system being available for people who want their children to be educated primarily and almost exclusively in French. And that's a good thing.

We've seen programs come up, for example, where students who are interested in military life can go to Vimy Ridge academy here in the city of Edmonton and participate not only in their schooling but in some, you know, important military traditions, participate in that kind of education and engagement. We've had at the Vimy Ridge academy not only the military involvement. A school of dance was also in the same building for quite some time, where they allowed that kind of choice to parents. We've also seen schools focusing on sports like hockey. St. Francis Xavier high school, for example, focuses on that kind of education.

Choice in education is not only possible; it exists. It allows parents right now to look around, decide what kind of programs they would like to see, and have their children attend those programs, but it's done within a public education system that ensures that inequality does not get introduced into the system. It doesn't matter whether you go to St. Francis Xavier, whether you go to Vimy Ridge academy or you go to Old Scona, which is dedicated towards students who are high academic achievers. You still get the resources of this province behind you, and you get an equal opportunity to students at any of the other schools to be successful and to be positive participants in this great democratic society that we have created.

Now, I've been reading, in preparation for our discussions here, some of the conversations about the voucher system as it has existed in the United States over the last number of years. We are very concerned on our side of the House about the adoption of this American model and bringing it into Canada, this voucher system,

largely supported by members of the right wing in the United States who do not share the set of values that I have been talking about here in terms of equality. Instead, what they're seeking to achieve is greater success for a small group of students and neglect of the large mass of students that are out there who are not part of this narrow group. That is what the voucher system does.

Now, I know that the research that I have been reading, the academic papers that have been done around the school voucher system have indicated that we have a significant problem in the States with issues of inequality and, in fact, issues of the voucher system contributing to a lesser learning, not just in the public systems, that become defunded through this process, but even in the private schools, who begin to fail to adhere to the curriculum standards of the larger system because they no longer need to do so. The supervision, the transparency isn't there. So there are significant concerns that the voucher system has just not been successful where tried. In fact, the vast majority of the research, the metastudies that are done would indicate that, on average, the success of the voucher system has been neutral to negative. It does not venture into the positive side. So I'm not sure why we'd even want to duplicate a system that's been demonstrably bad for the general public. I'm very concerned about that.

One of the concerns, of course, is that inequality increases when you allow a voucher system, and the reason for that is because there is a dynamic that gets established at the beginning that, of course, doesn't turn into inequality right away – nothing bad happens in the first year, and schools open and get started – but over time the process is such that inequality rises continuously over the years. A number of factors contribute to that. One of them is that in order to have money to run your school now, the schools must compete in a sort of commercial way to attract students not as learners but as funders. That means that significant amounts of money that would normally in a school system be put toward a good curriculum, good supplies, and good resources for the students are now being put into advertising and recruitment campaigns to attract students into the school system. Right away that means that we're spending some of our money, some of our public dollars, not on good education but on advertising instead, which is something that, simply, I can't condone.

But, of course, what happens over time, then, is that for those schools that have the resources to advertise better, to attract people with the greater resources that may be available – "If your children come to our program, they will learn to canoe the Nahanni river and survive anything that's possible," just, you know, as an extreme example – those kinds of things begin to happen. But what that means, then, is that they begin to provide to the students things that are not available to everybody, so we begin to have inequality.

Some people have school experiences that expose them to a wider range of activities than others, and naturally they're successful. They have more opportunity. More good things happen. And when that happens, parents are willing to put in more money. More than that, when those students graduate and they go on to be successful because they've had these increased opportunities, they tend to come back, and they tend to be great donors as alumni to their schools.

8:50

Slowly, not the first year but over a period of years, the amount of money that's funnelled into some schools increases dramatically through the building of an alumni body and the provision of extraordinary experiences, the net result being that you have a situation where those people who can afford it can not only take their public dollars, their voucher, and go to that school, but it becomes a self-selection process that occurs over a number of years

in which only people with extreme wealth are able to afford the best of the schools. What you have, then, is decreased opportunity for people that come from limited circumstances to rise above their circumstances because they simply can't afford the opportunities that people with great wealth have in this system.

The concern here is that you begin to introduce inequality as a factor in opportunity. The underlying philosophy behind public school systems was that all students matter and that all students need to have opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to hear from my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford. He always provides us with a great deal of historical context and education as well, and I think that many members of this Assembly perhaps need some more education on the different systems and how those systems are functioning across the world today. So I'd like my colleague to continue.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. One of the other concerns that we have with this rising inequality, that tends to be exacerbated by the voucher system, is the fact that in these private schools they not only can select for money, as I've indicated so far, and therefore provide a different experience to the students, but they often select for other factors such as disabilities. Students with significant disabilities require more supports, and it can become very quickly a factor that students with disabilities are not admitted into the private schools because they drain the resources than a nondisabled student would drain from their resources.

What happens, then, is that all of those students that need the extra attention, that need the extra support end up in the public school system, and the students that tend to, you know, come from successful families and typically don't need lots of extra support are funnelled into the private school system. So what we see, again, is an inequality, an inequality based not this time on finances and poverty but an inequality based on ability and, particularly, disability. I think that's something that we have to be very concerned about.

You know, I think the best thing about a public system is that it encourages everyone to rise to the greatest level of their own ability. But if you are excluding them based on their ability before they even have a chance to experience opportunity, then what we'll see is a diminishment of the opportunity for people with disabilities, whatever those disabilities may be. It could be, of course, physical disabilities or mental disabilities, issues like ADHD, issues like deafness, and so on. All of these kinds of concerns may be reasons for them to exclude you from coming into the private school. Those students still need to be educated and still will be educated in a good way in the public system, but they do not get the chance to have the opportunities that are available in schools that not only take public dollars but are able to take private dollars as well. I am very concerned about the nature of this, and it's not because I'm against choice in education.

As I mentioned before, I celebrate the fact that in the school systems here in Edmonton we have created a variety of educational choices that are available, whether it be about sports or dance or military history or whether it be about religion. The Catholic school system has a Jewish school in their system as a way of providing an opportunity for them to be part of a school board. You know, we have schools that speak many different languages in this program.

In my own area I have schools that speak French and speak Spanish and speak German. They're great schools, and I'm happy to have them.

Choice is available already, but we did that without defunding the public system and centralizing dollars for a few to have an extraordinary opportunity. Instead, we stuck to our values of having a school system which supports the equal opportunity for all people, regardless of their circumstances, regardless of their background, regardless of their orientation or their family history, to have a positive school experience, and I think that's something that we need to maintain. There are certainly ways in which we can increase choice within the school system without attacking the public system, by going out to parents and asking: "What are the extras you'd like to see? Can we within the public system set up a school that does something particular that you are interested in?" If there are enough people that are interested in it, then they can create that school.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak on amendment RA1 to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this amendment, which says that the bill

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

An important amendment. We know that this bill impacts every single one of us, constituents in our ridings. We have schools in our ridings, children and kids in our ridings. It's an important bill, and we owe it to the children that we get this right.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Oftentimes the government side will get up and talk about choice in education and will say that somehow we don't support choice in education. I think that in my riding parents do choose different kinds of schooling. There are many families who go to FFCA. There are families who go to a TLC, who go to an Islamic school, the Almadina charter academy, and schools like that along with public and Catholic schools as well.

However, when we talk about choice, the first thing when they choose to go to a different school other than their designated school: they're asked to pay for the transportation; they're charged extra in terms of education and other fees. If the government is really talking about choice in education, then I think we should have those conversations, that choice shouldn't mean that parents have to pay for that. If it's a choice, then across the system parents should be able to choose freely. Whether they're choosing public, Catholic, or these charter schools, it shouldn't come at an additional cost. That's a huge issue in my riding because the CBE recently published their transportation schedule and other fee schedules, and if you're in a nonmandated program, you will end up paying somewhere around \$800. That's a huge chunk of money. When we are talking about choice, I think we should make sure that if parents choose a different school than their designated school, they shouldn't be asked to pay for that choice.

9:00

Specifically with respect to this motion, how the data that government provided doesn't support the content of this piece of legislation, if I look briefly at their survey, they collected data about overall satisfaction with information available and overall satisfaction with amount of choice available. Throughout the province – northern Alberta, Edmonton, Calgary, southern Alberta, separate schools, francophone – like, for the most part I think

people are more satisfied with the amount of choice they have available. Based on this, I think they are less satisfied with the information available.

If we were to respond to the concerns of Albertans as reflected in this survey, we will be talking about how to make sure that people are satisfied with the information their kids are getting in the school system, and that would mean that we will work on updating our curriculum, the work which we started. At that time, I guess, the then UCP opposition had all kinds of conspiracy theories about that work, people who are engaged in that work, even knowing that there were almost 100,000 Albertans who participated in that process, and they have abandoned that work.

The second thing. When my colleagues and I engage with constituents, with parents, with families, I think the number one thing they will come up with: they want a properly funded school system. Even the government is talking about choice in education and has included article 26(3) of the United Nations declaration in their preamble, but first and foremost the government needs to make sure that everyone has the right to an education and they have access to education. That will include removing transportation fees. That will include removing those additional instructional fees.

The second thing. Not long ago the government promised that there will be fully funded funding of our education system. Notwithstanding their promises, they cut \$126 million from our school system mid-year. They also fired 25,000 school staff. That doesn't leave much choice for parents. I think if the government wants to get this right and if they are really talking about choice in education, we could refer this bill, not read this bill a second time, engage with parents, families, and get this right.

I do understand that that bill was part of their platform, but that platform was also 100-some pages long, and by just getting elected, it doesn't mean that every single Albertan went through their platform and endorsed them on every single thing. This bill relates to our kids, parents, and families, important to everyone in all the constituencies.

I will urge the government to vote in favour of this motion and take time to get this bill right. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There is a 29(2)(a). I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to take some time to respond to the Member for Calgary-McCall's statements. You know, I had to have a little bit of a chuckle when we're hearing about: our election platform was so long. Like, we're sorry for providing you with this extreme detail and transparency and the sense of good government. This Choice in Education Act, 2020, was very, very expressly defined. I mean, it was articulated at multiple conventions. It was articulated at multiple rallies. It was articulated on the campaign trail several times. I know that in my riding it was one of the most important things that I championed, one of the most important things that I talked about on the doors, especially in rural Alberta. We had some really good conversations with family members on the doorstep and parents on the doorstep who wanted to be able to make that decision for their children.

What I haven't heard from that side of the House – you know, we keep hearing: we support choice in education; we support choice in education. You might support that in theory, but as far as putting your money where your mouth is, you didn't support that at all in the last four years of your mandate. In fact, as far as choice in education goes, you made parents feel like they were adversaries to their children. At the end of the day, we as a government – and I'm proud to stand on this side of the House to say that we respect loving

parents, and we respect their ability to choose for their children. At the end of the day, I know there are a lot of members on that side of the House who would like some kind of state-run everything, but at the end of the day your family is your family, and parents should be the ones who are deciding what they're doing with their own kids, especially in their own kids' lives.

I have to say that I was a little bit – like, I just still can't get past the point: our platform was too long. Like, forgive us. I mean, you know, there was a lot of detail in that platform. I believe there were over 350 commitments if I'm correct. Is that correct?

Mr. Neudorf: Three hundred seventy-five.

Ms Glasgo: Well, 375 commitments.

You know, we're following through on those. We're not even in the second year of our mandate, and I think we're over halfway there, aren't we? I would say that that's a pretty good record, a good report card, if you will. I'm proud to stand on that.

You know, we hear a lot of conversations about American-style this, American-style that, and voucher systems. This is in no way establishing a voucher system or American-style anything. The only people who have an affinity for American-style anything are the members opposite. They just can't stop talking about it. I don't know why. It blows my mind. Like, we're in Alberta, and at the end of the day we're here to represent Albertans. This is overwhelmingly what they wanted, choice in education and respect for loving parents. By including that clause from the UN declaration on the rights of the child: that expressly enumerates, Mr. Speaker, and expressly articulates just how important that is. As a province, that we'd be willing to put that into legislation speaks 10-fold to that.

I would just encourage the members opposite to maybe the next time they get up – and, I mean, I'm sure we'll have a lot of discussion on this as we're still on the amendment, which I believe is questioning the reliability of the feedback or the actual meat in the feedback there. At the end of the day, I mean, my 29(2)(a) is my opportunity to respond to the member opposite, and what I heard was problematic to say the least.

I would just encourage them, you know, maybe to talk to parents who are concerned about losing choice in education or are concerned about losing their schools that they send their children to. I know that when I was door-knocking and campaigning, I ran into a family who has a number of children who are going to Newell Christian School. They were concerned with the guidelines put in by the last government. They were concerned with the government's overreach into the life of their faith-filled school and their faith-based school.

At the end of the day, I know that the Minister of Education presented some pretty – the accountability pillars are fantastic. I mean, we're showing that we have some of the most safe and caring schools we've ever had. We're excelling. I mean, a lot of these faith-based schools have specialized programming for certain children who need it. I know that for this family that was particularly important, and they were worried about losing their school altogether, Mr. Speaker. I can only imagine what would happen if the NDP got in again and started listening to these radical groups that want one school system and want to eliminate that choice for parents altogether.

I guess I'll give the remaining time to the hon. member to talk about how he would stand up for parents when for the last four years he did absolutely nothing.

The Acting Speaker: With 20 seconds, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: In the last four years we added \$2 billion, 244 schools. So far their record is that they have fired 20,000 teachers and cut \$126 million from the school system. They're after destroying the education system, period.

9:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I see that to join debate, the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise again to provide my support for Bill 15, the Choice in Education Act, 2020, amending the Education Act. I will oppose this amendment for many reasons. This bill is a major part of our education platform, which we committed to Albertans and was favourably well taken during the election. I applaud the minister for honouring this commitment, which I know that many parents in Calgary-East and in the entire province are happy to accept as this bill seeks to protect parental choice when it comes to their child's education. Also, it would be notable to mention that it is an answer to numerous concerns that were brought out by the education system partners towards improving the provincial education system for the benefit of all Albertans.

Before I go further, Mr. Speaker, I just want to congratulate all the graduates of the class of 2020. We are now seeing virtual or drive-through graduation ceremonies throughout the province. I know that it is a kind of different setting right now for this special occasion, a remarkable milestone for their lives as well as on the part of the proud parents and family members. These graduates are the product of our world-class education system and will be stepping into another level of their lives. I wish all the graduates a better tomorrow and good spirits as they journey to new endeavours.

Coming back, Mr. Speaker, as we talk about the importance of the right of parental choice on the means of educating children, we should be reminded that this is not having a goal to enrich oneself but to plan ahead with what they want to do to their society in the future. Our children are going to lead our great province in the future, and for that matter it is considered that education is one of the most important inheritances that a parent could provide to their child. Alberta has been respecting the rights of parents to make personal decisions in regard to the education of their children. Bill 15 seeks to affirm that practice, and like I mentioned during my previous comments on this bill, it also reaffirms our adherence to international laws and provincial law; that is, the universal declaration of human rights, an international covenant on civil and political rights; and the Alberta Bill of Rights, which all respect the right of parents over the education of their children. I have already mentioned before their pertinent provisions.

Mr. Speaker, as we understand the importance of parents to have the full right to be the primary decision-maker for their child, we must also consider the delivery of such service as to fully respect that right. Some may say that, yes, we have been respecting it already. But wouldn't it be better if we would provide more choices to select from? If we mention the current status and will not introduce changes, what will happen to the waiting list of applications of charter schools or similar applications wanting to open or parents who have wanted other types of schooling for their children? Will they remain to wait on the list? With this bill, a simplified version of the creation of charter schools will be made with some requirements, hereby reducing red tape. This bill permits the establishment of vocation-based charter schools.

This survey may have reflected that there is a sufficient number of respondents that have expressed that they are content with the current choices, but there is no guarantee that this decision would

still be obtained if presented with more choices as some parents may have opted for their nearest school because there is no other choice for them. What I'm trying to say, Mr. Speaker, is that it would be better if there are more choices for parents rather than limiting it to what we presently have. This may also resolve to the lessening of the population of children in public schools, thereby giving teachers more time and concentration on every student.

I have heard from some teachers in my riding that it would be tough if classrooms would have had more than the average number of students in a class. So if you would say that there is no reason or no need for the expansion of charter schools, I suggest that you should talk to the teachers as well for you to be enlightened about student population in schools and its impact on the creation of charter schools. I'm sure that parents in Calgary-East would be happy to see the establishment of more schools within the constituency in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to know. Why don't the NDP members seem to understand what the benefits would be with the establishment of charter schools in their ridings? If we invest more in our education system, we'll be assured that our society in general will receive more in return. This amendment to the Education Act will ensure that the right of parents to choose will be protected and supported more than ever. The bill emphasizes equality among all aspects of the education system, whether that be public schools, separate schools, francophone schools, independent schools, charter schools, or home education. I just want to restate that this bill will not be changing the K to 12 funding but will enhance our education system.

As we acknowledge the efficiency and effectiveness of our public school system, it is also important to point out the significance of private schools in our education system, Mr. Speaker. Private schools have been an essential part of our education system, which many parents have chosen to have their children enrolled in.

Another option that this bill carries for parents would be the allowing of an unsupervised, notification-only, nonfunded home education program with a requirement of annual notification of the intention to home-school, and parents will have to submit a home education plan. Let me just emphasize that we are absolutely not reducing funding in education. If we were to look back on the Education budgets of the past, you could see it increasing, and we're maintaining the pot, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has announced that we are transitioning to a new funding model that will better manage system growth while maintaining overall spending, that will ensure funds are directed to the classroom, protect our most vulnerable students, provide equal funding for rural school authorities with declining enrolment, and will provide all schools with sustainable and predictable funding, something school boards have long been asking for.

As the NDP members are repeatedly commenting about the education assistants that were laid off, I will again mention, Mr. Speaker, that the chief superintendent of the Calgary Catholic school district has sent a letter to parents that all the education assistants and staff that were impacted by the budget adjustments will be coming back to work at the beginning of the new school year.

I will close, Mr. Speaker, by saying that we must continue to improve our healthy relationship with families that have been neglected and have received insufficient support from the previous government. We cannot wholeheartedly say that we respect their right to choose education for their children if we do not provide them with more choices or are limiting it to what we have at the moment. I say that this bill fulfills and respects that right, and I see no reason to withhold the benefit to Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should we have any takers.

Seeing none, are there any hon. members looking to join debate on amendment RA1?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are back on the bill proper, Bill 15. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 15, which is a piece of legislation that has some very interesting connections to my educational past and to educators that I ended up being a student of earlier on. I know that in previous discussions on this piece of legislation I referenced Mr. Emery Dosdall, who was my grade 6 teacher in I believe his first year of teaching in the Edmonton public school board. That would have been in approximately 1968 or so.

9:20

Of course, Mr. Dosdall went on to become the superintendent of Edmonton public schools and was instrumental in the implementation of what were then called alternative programs within the Edmonton public school system in a response to the then demand, sort of led by the then Education minister, Halvar Jonson, and others, to allow a greater charter school operation in the province. It was a great debate that took place. The debate that we're having now, of course, is charged with some emotion as well, as it always is when we talk about education and the education of our children and charter schools, private schools, special programming and so forth and the rules and regulations around them. It's no different today, as I mentioned.

I think that it's important that we do reflect upon some of the history that we've found in this province around the charter school issue. I know that Mr. Dosdall is still involved in education, having been an assistant deputy minister in the British Columbia Education ministry. We have been conversing a little bit or communicating a little bit. I haven't gotten a full round of his current thoughts on Bill 15 right now, but I hope to have longer communications with him so that I can perhaps bring some of those thoughts to the House and bring up to date some of the debate that took place in 1993, 1994 to ultimately bring what was then Bill 19 into fruition. On May 25, 1994, that bill received royal assent in this House.

It started out as a means of granting the ability of parents to bring forward a charter school more easily, something that I think will sort of ring true again here today as to the intent of the government now in bringing forward Bill 15, as they say, a choice in education. Sometimes there are always underlying currents as to what the actual intent of a bill is, quite often contrary to what its actual title might be. In fact, I've been clear in this House that I think that Bill 15 is really more, in effect, an effort to stifle the public education system rather than to grant choice to those who wish to establish charter schools. One of the major things that was done and that this bill, Bill 15, seeks to do is to reverse a very interesting part of the Bill 19 that was established and passed in 1994.

What Bill 19 did: during six days of debate what happened was that the intentions of Minister Jonson, the then Education minister, were somewhat thwarted. There were some very interesting amendments that took place, Mr. Speaker, during the debate on that Bill 19, which established the ability to create charter schools in Alberta. The point that I'm getting to is that some of the things that were amended during the debate had to do with the local school board's authority. There were things such as a local school board's

ability to monitor and, if necessary, revoke the charter of charter schools.

I'm quoting here from a document that was an essay written by two individuals, Duncan Parliament and Brett Bilyk, entitled *Meeting the Challenge: The Klein Revolution, Charter Schools, and Alternative Programs in Edmonton Public Schools*, a paper they wrote for their professor, Dr. Pollock, of MacEwan University. It's a March 23, 2015, paper. It's a timely document, written quite clearly, and it's very germane to our topic because it lays out some of the concerns that the legislators of the day, in 2015, had regarding the proposals of the original piece of legislation that Mr. Jonson had in mind and what, in fact, ended up getting introduced and passed as amendments to the bill.

As I said before, Mr. Jonson didn't get his way completely.

During the debate, several amendments required charter schools to acquire not only the approval of the Minister of Education, but of the local public school board as well

on an application for a charter school.

The amendments also gave local school boards the ability to monitor and, if necessary, revoke the charter of charter schools. Consequently, charter schools would have to work [in] close cooperation with local school boards. Moreover, the Members of the Legislative Assembly insisted the introduction of charter schools become a "pilot project", and introduced amendments to cap the number allowed to operate in the province at fifteen.

Mr. Speaker, there was a concern by legislators of the day about the very nub of what we're talking about here with respect to Bill 15, and that is the ability of a local school board to allow or deny a charter school application.

Contrary to the then Minister of Education's desires at that time, legislators in this House successfully brought forward amendments, which were accepted and passed, to restrain the minister from having the sole authority to make those decisions with respect to approving or denying an application for a charter school, something that is at the crux of the piece of legislation we're debating in this House today. It seeks to reverse that very, very important decision-making role of the local school board to allow or deny an application. What this Bill 15 does: rather than suggesting, as the title implies, giving choice in education to parents, what it does is restrict the ability of the public education system to accommodate those choices.

I know that of the 15 charter school applications that could be accepted, Mr. Jonson expected that in short order they would be snapped up right away. However, the essay goes on to say:

Education Minister Halvar Jonson confidently predicted that by the end of 1995, the charter school cap of fifteen would be reached. This prediction, however, has proven wildly inaccurate.

As of 2015,

not long ago, Mr. Speaker,

not only has the cap not been increased, but only thirteen charter schools are currently operating in the province; at no point was the cap of fifteen ever met.

So the wild race to create new charter schools was less of a horse race and more of a turkey trot. There wasn't a huge, huge demand.

The paper goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that the responsibility for that lack of demand or smaller than expected demand that Mr. Jonson, the Education minister of the day, had is largely because of the success of the public school system in incorporating the needs of parents and the desires of parents to have alternative programming available to them within the public system, in a place where it was more affordable for them, where they didn't have to go through the fundraising efforts regularly that they would have had to in a regular charter school system.

9:30

I know that the system that we have currently, that was championed by then Edmonton public school superintendent Emery Dossdall, is one that we're very proud of today. When we look at the system that we have in place, it has allowed a variety of different schools to thrive within the Edmonton public system, some of which are in my own constituency of Edmonton-McClung in the west end. One of them, of course, is the Talmud Torah school. It's a special school within the Edmonton public school system. The initial application, that was made in '93, was for the Nellie McClung school for girls. Initially 70 students applied, and ultimately over 170 in the following years became students there. There are the cogito schools, which initially came up during that time period as well.

There's been a large history of success within the public school system of incorporating the demands or the desires of members of the public to have a particular type of education or a charter school application, that otherwise might have become a charter school, incorporated into the public system and very successfully. That is why, the paper argues – and I concur with the assessment – the number of charter schools has never gone beyond the cap or met the cap that was set in 1994 under the Jonson Education ministry and the Klein regime. The success of the public school system is not something that we should use against it. I think it speaks highly of the desire to meet the needs of parents in our province who wish to have that choice to educate their children and also do so in a way which is publicly funded and is affordable for them in the long term, which is managed within the public education system, a system that they don't have to go raising private funding dollars for on a regular basis. That's something that I think is acknowledged by the popularity of the programs offered by the public school system.

The parents that are looking to support their children in educational choices in this province are telling our caucus that they really want a properly funded education system with a modern curriculum and no barriers to learning. I know that the question that I ask quite often not only with respect to this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, but most pieces of legislation that are under consideration is: who actually does this serve? Who is it intended to serve? Who is it crafted in response to? I wonder if indeed that answer doesn't lie within the notes of the essay that I've quoted from before, where the desire is to actually circumvent the success of the public schools by removing the requirement that the public school authority must be in approval of the establishment of a charter school, something that was wisely put in place.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women has risen.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the discussion on this. I just wanted to make a few clarifications and comments with regard to what we just heard. The member was saying that there was no need, that growth was not being shown and that there was no need to see charter schools come forward, that there maybe was not a need or that people weren't interested.

If I remember correctly, when I was first elected, when I was in opposition, there were something like 10,000 or 11,000 students on a waiting list to get into charter schools. I mean, that number really resonates with me because at that time, when I had the privilege of being in opposition, we spoke about this on a regular basis. I would have to say that in most of our ridings, certainly, there was a large, large population of parents that were absolutely seeking this option. I believe that at that time there were only 13 school authorities. It was capped at 15. I would have to suggest – and I'm sure most of

the folks on this side would agree with me – that there was such a demand.

I would love to know where the member got this information and to quote from I think it was 1996, he was saying, to now. Per capita if you see the number of people that move to the province and if you ask them about education, a large portion of those parents come here because of choice in education. A tremendous number. I mean, they come for jobs, and they come for all of the opportunities that Alberta provides for them, but if they're going to raise families here and choice in education is a pillar of what they're able to provide for their children, I can guarantee you that on this side we have a very, very strong, I would suggest, propensity to suggest that choice in education would be the most important thing, which includes public education.

I'd also like to mention that, clearly, the reason why charter schools have not been able to expand is because of regulatory and practical barriers that have actually resulted in government influence and their ability to actually cap those schools. It's actually a regulatory problem and burden that is stopping parents from being able to access charter schools, contrary to what that member just said.

We campaigned on this. This was a campaign commitment for us. Without a doubt, one of the most important things that we heard over and over again, not just about charter schools but public schools and private schools and faith-based schools and every type of school that we have had the privilege of having in this province, is that Alberta is a leader.

In fact, if you look at the marks that come out of charter schools, there is a significant difference and not just because they're catering, like the member would have you believe, to only a particular type of kid. I mean, we've got charter schools that go with everything from academic achievement to children who are on the margins, children who are suffering from mental strain to kids who are in very, very difficult socioeconomic areas.

On top of that, I think one of my favourite things about the charter schools is for new Canadians, the ones that are dedicated to English as a second language. We know, most of us who know a lot of new Canadians coming in, that their kids' very first language is probably the language of the country that they're coming from, or they might even in some cases know a little bit more English than their parents. But you can imagine a system where you're coming in and you're just being inundated by another language in math and social studies and science. These are now difficult things. These charter schools have taken up that ability to help these kids have the best education possible and to be able to thrive in this province.

Like I was mentioning – I mean, this was a while back. I don't even know what the numbers are now, to be quite frank. I mean, like I said, we talked about this significantly then. We find that charter schools are sought after. I think I could probably talk to every member on this side, and it was a conversation that came up over and over and over again. I think also that one of the things that the opposition has to remember – and they were on this side – is the high level of accountability that any school has to the government for curriculum.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join the debate on Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

9:40

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point pursuant to Standing Order 31(1.2) I wish to advise the Assembly that there shall be no morning sitting for the following days: Wednesday, June 10, 2020, and Thursday, June 11, 2020.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. The House accepts that as notice. However, I do perhaps just want to clarify. I'm not convinced of the standing order that you used. I believe it might be 3(1.2).

Mr. McIver: Standing Order 3(1.2).

The Acting Speaker: I thought I heard 31(1.2).

Mr. McIver: Thank you for that clarification.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 2 Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to rise in support of Bill 2, the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020. At this point I would like to make an amendment on behalf of the hon. minister who moved the bill. I have the requisite number of copies. I'll wait until you give me permission . . .

The Deputy Chair: I would just ask that the hon. Minister of Transportation read the amendment. I believe that this will be amendment A1, for the purposes of debate.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Amendment A1 is brief. I will read it to you. It says that the bill is amended as follows: A. Section 10 is struck out.

For those keeping score at home, section 10 says that the bill comes into force on April 1, 2020. By removing that, of course, then the bill would come into force when it receives royal assent. It's our considered opinion that this will actually improve the bill, and we're hoping that the folks on all sides of the aisle might even agree to this. Like I say, it doesn't change the character or content of the bill; it only changes the date on which it comes into force. I hope that members of the House find it the right thing to do, to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate on amendment A1?

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm actually just looking for a point of clarity. So we're striking out section 10 – I don't actually have the bill in front of me. It will come into force – what was the date originally?

Mr. McIver: April 1.

Ms Sweet: April 1, 2020, so we've passed it. Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: All right. That was nice to see.

Are any hon. members looking to join debate on amendment A1? Seeing none, I'm prepared to ask the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to the bill proper on Bill 2, are there any hon. members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 2 for the first time during debate in the Legislature. Let me just start my comments by saying that I'm very pleased that the government of Alberta is moving towards a more mature approach to regulating the sale and consumption of alcohol in the province of Alberta.

I was remarking with some of my colleagues in the back that we have come a long way from the days when airlines used to have to stop serving alcohol as they flew over Alberta because the provincial laws limited the sale of alcohol, even on airlines. Those were the old days of Social Credit, and they had a much different approach to the sale and consumption of alcohol than our current government does, so I applaud the government for taking a much more mature approach to the sale and consumption of alcohol.

Certainly, it's been my experience, my observation as I've lived in other jurisdictions that have had less stringent control over the sale and consumption of alcohol that the problems that alcohol can sometimes lead to decrease. As a university student, Mr. Chair, I had the good fortune to live in Germany for a couple of years, and of course access to alcohol in Germany is – access to wine and beer, anyway, is available to people 14 years or older legally. You can buy alcohol of any kind at any supermarket, grocery store. It's widely available. You can consume it in public virtually anywhere, and that was one of my favourite activities when I was a student, hanging out with my friends in the town square in Germany and sitting around the fountain and enjoying some of the good German beer with my friends in public.

I certainly noticed that, you know, public drunkenness, the violence that is sometimes associated with bars and clubs that are confined to specific areas of the city was not nearly as problematic in Germany as it was here, and I sincerely hope that by loosening the restrictions around the sale and consumption of alcohol, Albertans will also behave themselves accordingly and learn to deal with alcohol in a much more responsible manner and that we see less binge drinking, less violence related to alcohol, those kinds of things.

One of the moves that I'm particularly fond of in this legislation is set out in section 8, which amends section 89 in subsection (2) by striking out "with food" wherever it occurs and then in subsection (3) by striking out "or is not consuming food while consuming liquor in a designated picnic area." What this section does, Mr. Chair, is that it makes it easier for people to consume alcohol in public parks. I think this is a fantastic idea. In fact, I have had thousands and thousands of e-mails to my constituency office saying: we are in favour of allowing Albertans to enjoy their time in public parks fully. The catch, though, is that we actually need to have public parks in which we can exercise this right that through the bill is being given to us.

9:50

One of the concerns that many of my constituents have raised around this section of the legislation, which allows for the consumption of alcohol in public parks, is that they are concerned

that there will be drastically fewer public parks in the province of Alberta in which they can enjoy this right. We know, of course, that the government has closed either fully or partially 20 provincial parks and provincial recreation areas in the province of Alberta and that they have plans to sell off another 164 sites. You know, I just want to address the issue of the language that I'm using when I say "sell off parks" because I know that the minister of environment takes issue with that phrase. Let me just clarify that when I talk about the government selling parks, I don't actually mean that they are putting up Rochan Sands provincial park for sale directly, Mr. Chair. I do mean that they are putting all of the facilities that are in that provincial park up for sale, and then they are turning the land over to a private manager for a long-term lease so that the people of Alberta can't get that back, right? But technically none of those things are for sale.

There are 164 sites that are scheduled to be sold off in this manner and another 20, as I mentioned, that are being closed. So the question is: where are people going to be able to enjoy the ability that this legislation gives them to consume alcohol in parks? This is over a third of the public parks in the provincial park system that are being put up for sale; 75 per cent of all provincial recreation areas are being put up for sale or closed down. The question is: where are people going to be able to enjoy this right to consume alcohol? I've certainly had that question posed to me by thousands and thousands of Albertans who were looking forward to camping and spending some time with their families and loved ones in provincial parks, maybe being able to enjoy a bottle of wine or crack open a beer or, you know, whatever favourite drink they like to take with them when they're camping, but they're not going to be able to do that nearly as easily anymore as they were had this legislation been brought forward to the Legislature at this time last year, Mr. Chair.

So it is with a great deal of disappointment, I think, that while I will vote in favour of this legislation, it's a very hollow victory, a hollow victory in the sense that people will have the theoretical ability to enjoy an alcoholic drink in the public park of their choice, but in actual practice there will be far fewer public parks and provincial recreation areas in which they can enjoy this freedom that the government is giving to them. I think that's important to keep in mind, Mr. Chair, when we're considering this bill, that it's fine and good to allow people to have the right to consume alcohol in public parks, but in order for that right to be meaningful, the province needs to provide public park spaces where they can enjoy this drink.

So I would urge the government that if they are serious about allowing Albertans to consume alcohol in public places, as this legislation is intended to do, that they invest in the public places where people will be able to have these drinks. Rather than closing down or selling off almost 200 parks and provincial recreation areas in the province, not only should the province be keeping those open, but they should be building more.

I had the privilege of talking to some RV dealers in the province of Alberta, and they told me that currently in the province of Alberta there are almost 400,000 RVs registered; 400,000 RVs registered but only 6,000 camping spaces in the entire province of Alberta. Do the math. That means it's pretty hard to go out and take your RV to a camping spot in the province of Alberta, which means that it's pretty hard to go out and enjoy a drink if you're trying to camp overnight in the province of Alberta. What the RV dealers tell me and what my constituents tell me is that they would love to be able to enjoy liquor freely and without the restrictions that used to be in place before this legislation comes into effect, but in order to do that meaningfully, they need more public spaces.

I would seriously urge the government to reconsider this move to close down and sell off almost 200 parks and recreation areas and instead drastically expand the park system, create thousands more camping spaces so that more Albertans can go out and enjoy the beverage of their choice in Alberta's fantastic natural spaces, Mr. Chair.

With that, I think I'll take my seat. To recap, I'll be voting in favour of this legislation, but I'll also continue to advocate for more parks and recreation areas for the people of Alberta to enjoy with the favourite drink of their choice.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen to debate.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I've got to give the hon. member credit. He doesn't give up in the face of overwhelming odds. In the face of information completely diametrically opposed to what he says, he keeps saying it with no evidence to support what he says, and he says it over and over and over again. What did he say: 20-some parks? I would just challenge the hon. member to name them because, as the hon. environment minister said, there are no parks for sale. Now, the hon. member that just spoke can say that there are as often as he wants, I suppose, and as loud as he wants and to as many people as he wants, but the fact is that the hon. member is wrong. I actually believe that the hon. member knows he's wrong, which is a little disturbing because he keeps saying things that he knows are not right.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The fact is that what's interesting is that he keeps saying these things. He says that he's going to vote for the legislation so they can have a drink in parks that he insists won't be there. That's outstanding logic. Outstanding. I would just say, Madam or Mr. Chair – that I think we can all forgive me for being unsure at this point because both chairs are there beside the chair, and I'm not sure which chair is in charge, so I think I can be forgiven for not being sure.

The fact is that while I'm very pleased that the hon. member that just spoke is supporting the bill before us, the logic that he used to arrive at that decision is completely flawed because, as the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks has said numerous times in this House when the hon. member that just spoke asked him, there are no parks for sale. I actually believe that the hon. member knows that that's true, that there are no parks for sale, and for some reason that's, I guess, on one hand troubling and on the other hand mystifying, that the hon. member keeps saying things that I believe he knows aren't true, primarily that parks are being sold when parks are not being sold.

I would thank the hon. member for supporting the bill, but I would ask him to check the facts behind the logic that he used to arrive at that good conclusion. It's a good conclusion, but he got there through logic that is not supported by fact because there are no parks being sold.

10:00

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I always appreciate the lectures that I get from the Minister of Transportation, especially about truth and facts and logic. I will have to say that I am surprised that in this one case he seems to be setting the bar a little bit high for coming to a decision based on facts and logic, a

standard to which I don't think the government holds itself and certainly the members opposite didn't hold themselves to when they were in opposition and argued against a lot of the things that we were bringing forward.

I just want to clarify, though, one thing that the member said about the fact that parks aren't for sale. I just want to say that I agree with the Minister of Transportation when he says that parks aren't for sale, because technically they're not for sale. Rochan Sands provincial park is not for sale. That is technically the truth. What is for sale is all of the facilities there and the land. So outside of the facilities and the land, nothing is for sale. You know, I will concede the point that only all of the facilities in our provincial parks and only all of the land that our provincial parks are on are for sale. I want to thank the member for making that important technical clarification.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to stand up for the first time and speak to Bill 2, the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020. Certainly, the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis commission, or AGLC, is an important corporation working for the benefit of Albertans, and they do great work. In my time as the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board I had many, many, many dealings with the board chair, the board members, the CEO, and staff. I can attest to the fact that they all do tremendous – they all give a hundred per cent to make sure that Albertans understand the gaming side of their mandate, the mandate for AGLC, and the liquor side. We did some pretty important things.

Now, as far as this bill goes, you know, it addresses four aspects of improvements, I guess you could say, but I wholeheartedly agree with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in terms of the concerns he raised with regard to parks, liquor in parks. This amendment will allow for liquor to be consumed in parks without food, and municipalities and urban municipalities will have the right, of course, to determine which parks, if any, in their jurisdictions that can take place in. Liquor licence approvals: it improves that somewhat. There are some licence conditions and then a raffle prize clarification, so that is being codified in legislation. I can remember that on occasion different groups would bring forward that concern, that they wanted to raffle off bottles, Texas mickys, and other kinds of things, and had to find ways to address those, but now they're being codified in legislation.

This bill, as far as it goes, as I said, I can see myself supporting. It's not very ambitious in terms of a bill, because I think there are far more important things that need to be addressed and that we were on our way to addressing and making sure took place. By that I mean that the market for Alberta's brewers and distillers is something that we spent a great deal of time on to make sure that it took place in greater and greater percentages, measured in terms of growth of the market of craft brewers and growth of the number of distillers. Over the period of time that I was responsible for that area, I can tell you that there was a significant growth in both craft brewing and distilling in this province. I'm told that there was a fivefold expansion from 2015 to 2019, and it's continuing to expand today as a result of the opportunities that we put in place for that industry.

With regard to this amendment act, in addition to the growth of that industry that occurred during our tenure, it also was an area where employment grew substantially. That was gratifying and not only for those businesses that took on more and more staff and saw more and more Albertans become employees and take pride in the

work that they're doing and the quality products that they were producing. I can tell you that with the products they were producing, right off the hop – there's a bit of a pun there – they were taking prizes internationally. I can remember those brewers feeling great pride in being able to win in the States and win in Europe as a result of their production of great, great beer.

So the expansion of the industry took place, and the kinds of things that we're seeing in this amendment act really won't help any of that, won't focus on seeing more opportunity for Alberta products on shelves in, say, Ontario or B.C. whereas we know that our shelves are loaded with B.C. product, both beers and spirits. We know that to try and get our product into those provinces is pretty impossible. The barriers that are put up by other places: none of that is benefited by this amendment act. This Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act doesn't help one iota in terms of getting Alberta products on the shelves in Ontario, for instance, because there are pretty massive barriers that Ontario has put in place.

You know, I remember that early in this government's tenure the Premier was at an all-Premiers meeting and came back almost like Chamberlain: I have an agreement of other Premiers, and we're going to be fixing this; we'll get Alberta product into other provinces. I don't think it's happened. I haven't travelled to other provinces in a little while, but you still don't see our beers and our spirits on their shelves to the degree that you see hundreds of their products on our shelves.

This bill, unfortunately, is a lot of things that don't benefit the industry. We, of course, challenged trade barriers in B.C. and Ontario. We worked to expand the offerings that bartenders could give their patrons in preparing cocktails and open bottles and conditioning those bottles in advance of people coming to buy them. That's been helpful to that market, the cocktail market, the bartenders' market. They found that we were taking actions, with the assistance of AGLC, that really helped out.

10:10

You know, the small beer, I guess you could say, that's in this amendment act is unfortunate. When you have the opportunity to bring forward amendments, you like to make sure they're substantive in the sense that they help the industry, that they put a greater spotlight on developing another sector of the economy that can really benefit from government assistance. We've got the great prerequisites, I guess you could say, for beer and alcohol and spirits right in this province. We've got great barley. We've got wonderfully trained technicians and brewers, who go through Olds College and places like that. They're homegrown, they want to do a great job, and they want a government who has their backs.

This Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, as I said, is small beer and doesn't really have the back of the industry at all. I mean, what it has is the ability, as I said, to see some relaxations of liquor in parks and municipalities around the province and licence approvals and conditions on licences that AGLC now can put on before infractions occur and, lastly, raffle prizes. This amendment act, Madam Chair, is something that I can see myself supporting as far as it goes, but, you know, I sincerely would have wished to vote for a stronger amendment act.

There are many, many things that need to be done still in this province that will assist this sector to develop even greater recognition for their products and their ability to market across Canada and around the world. Those barriers are still in place. The other provinces haven't done anything to moderate or lower trade barriers that we believe need to be challenged, that we, when we were in government, did challenge.

One good example of that is the lack of Alberta shelf space in liquor stores in other provinces around the country, which is regrettable

because we could have that industry, which is kind of inflation-proof – not inflation-proof. I guess it's recession-proof. It can do a lot in terms of a recession being in place, where alcohol can be set up and stored for several years for things like Scotch. You know, it just can't be produced and consumed right away. It needs to age. In the recession that we were in in 2015-16, as I said, we saw a fivefold growth in the beer industry, the beer sector and the alcohol sector, the spirits sector. That was in part because they have to put that away for a number of years, and they can hold on to it and see it age and become quality product and then be able to sell it at a higher premium once it fully ages, over a number of years for Scotch.

We did that. We supported the industry. It grew population in terms of employment, and we were pleased to see that happen. The results were clear in terms of people being able to win, as I said, prizes for quality product, and it was because of the inputs we have in this province: the hops, the grains, the malt, the water, and the expertise to put it all together.

The Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act before us is, you know, helpful. It could have been more helpful if it had focused on more things around addressing the challenges the industry and the sector have to get their product into the rest of the country. The fact that it doesn't do that speaks volumes, I think, in terms of the scope of this bill, speaks volumes in terms of the actual assistance this bill is endeavouring to provide the sector. I think the sector is starting to stand on its own in ways that are really positive, and this bill will provide an opportunity for people to consume what is produced by this sector in settings, in parks and other places, but I think the industry was looking for more stout legislation. They're only getting small beer in terms of the legislation before us here today.

It's an industry that's maturing, as I said, and that's a positive thing. It's an industry that employs a number of people, and, as I said, it's somewhat recession-proof in some aspects of it around spirits, but we want to ensure that it continues to grow. The fact that this bill does four things that allow people to consume in places that they previously didn't consume doesn't really increase the volume where the sector is needing, you know, responsible drinking to occur, of course, only responsible drinking to occur.

So, Madam Chair, I think with those thoughts, I'll consider taking my seat again and listening to the rest of the debate. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 2, a piece of legislation that I have a great deal of fondness for. I know that I've enjoyed the opportunity to camp in many of our provincial parks over the years, and I've also had an opportunity to tour internationally using a recreational vehicle in Australia and a little bit in Europe. But my experience primarily was in Australia, and I recall driving down the east coast of Australia, having flown there from a small trip to New Zealand, picking up a camper van near the Northern Territory and driving it down south to the southern portion of the country over the course of about three weeks, ending up in Canberra and the Gold Coast.

During that time frame, Madam Chair, I had the opportunity to stay, of course, every night in quite often a different location in a camper van park or a state or national park. Provincial is otherwise known in Australia as state. They were of a high standard, a high calibre, and the Australians are rightly proud of their park systems. I know that we never really ran out of options when we were travelling down the road in Australia looking for a place to stay on each particular night. In fact, we never really needed to – this is not too long ago; this was particularly in 2008 – go ahead and phone ahead for reservations. I never had that necessity. In fact, I'm trying

to remember what type of cellphone I had. It really was only just a flip-type, and it wouldn't have had the capacity to go online to make reservations. There was such a multitude of public options there that were so well maintained and affordable.

10:20

With respect to the numbers a recent article in the *Financial Review* shows that there are hundreds of what they're calling national parks in Australia. Queensland leads the way with 237, closely followed by New South Wales with 235 national parks, then comes Western Australia with 101, Victoria with 45, South Australia and Tasmania each with 19, and the Northern Territory with 24. What I'm getting at, Madam Chair, is that there are jurisdictions in the world which attract large volumes of international tourists who drive their camper vans, their campers, their motorhomes, their motorcycles with tents and tent trailers across their country and spend millions and millions of dollars enjoying their tour by parking each night at a camper van park or a park that, in this case in Australia, is a publicly owned and operated park, that we in this province don't really seem to have gotten ahold of.

I refer to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's comments about the number of RVs in this province and the number of campsites that we have to accommodate them. Of course, those numbers that he mentioned were 400,000 recreational vehicles in this province and 6,000 campsites, so there's a huge demand that isn't being met. Now, we will drive outside of Edmonton or Calgary or any other major centre or even smaller community in the province, and one of the road marks that you will see commonly is a storage site for recreational vehicles, and that's a testament to the percentage and the depth of ownership that we have in this province for recreational vehicles. Even now, at this time during a pandemic, the sales of recreational vehicles are actually quite brisk, with one dealership on highway 2 reporting 42 sales within a one-week period, I believe it was.

What we're doing with this legislation in Bill 2 is attempting to make what limited parks we have maybe more amenable, but the whole concept of serving the demand for parks and park campsites is something that we need to really address in a much more in-depth way and really take a good look at for the long term once international travel is resumed. We're hoping, of course, that a vaccine is found soon and that can happen and restrictions will be further eased, but the demand that we have for campsites is not being met, thus we're losing an incredible amount of revenue that otherwise we might be realizing.

One will see during the summer season in particular a number of private companies who rent or lease out camper vans or truck campers or travel trailers, primarily individual, self-contained camper vans, to tourists who are in the country – RV Canada and different names and different companies – but one wonders where in the world these individuals are getting their places to park each night. I know it certainly is not the type of options that I had when I was in Australia looking for a place to park each particular night.

There are limited places. Even if you think of yourself driving across the country on the Trans-Canada highway, across the prairies and in to the mountains and over to the coast, there are limited options, and you will find people driving these RV rentals pulling off the road fairly early because they indeed need to find a place before they're all filled up. The likelihood is that most of them have had their reservations made in advance for them by the company that they're leasing their vehicle from as part of the package so that they are in fact able to find a place to park and camp overnight. So there's a staggering number, Madam Chair, 400,000 RVs in the province, 6,000 campsites, yet the government is seeing fit to, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said, sell off a bundle of rights to hundreds of these campsites and basically lease them in

perpetuity to private operators, and that perhaps is going to lead the way for the development of nothing but a private parks system in this province in years to come.

The bill that we have before us today to allow greater freedom and liquor consumption in parks and the sale of liquor on park properties is something that I think Albertans are willing to take advantage of, are pleased to see. It, hopefully, will lead to the more responsible consumption of alcohol. There have been some issues and difficulties with it over the years in our parks, and I know that enforcement of some pretty wild parties has been a problem in some of the parks, that we hope will not be a future problem. I believe that the ability to consume responsibly in parks is something that the population will take advantage of and adhere to in many ways. I believe it will be almost a self-policing mechanism, where sort of the teenage bust-out, long-weekend parties will be a thing of the past because they just won't be stood for. There may be some exceptions, but I know that the monitoring of these new regulations and laws regarding consumption of alcohol in our parks is something that we'll all be watching quite carefully.

That's a minor consideration, though, Madam Chair, with respect to the whole parks issue in the province, because, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar quite rightfully said: in order to be able to consume alcohol in public parks, you've got to have public parks. That is something that I think is under threat. The government plainly is loath to say that the parks are for sale, but we know that one thing that you can sell is a long-term lease and the operating rights, and, in fact, that I believe is the road that this government is going down. I think that for the most part those parks that they continue to suggest are expensive to maintain or are underutilized – that's the argument that they make in trying to get Albertans to accept the closure of certain parks and the ability or the enablement of the government to declare them surplus. Therefore, opportunities for the private sector to come and lease them and operate those parks, I think, will become the *modus operandi* for this particular government in terms of park development in the province.

So be careful of that, and know that there are other jurisdictions, Madam Chair, where they have a long history of very deep pride in their national and state parks. In fact, in Australia right now, according to this *Financial Review* article, which I'll table at first opportunity, the great debate in Australia doesn't have to do with the privatization of parks; it has to do with the designation of parks. Because of the hundreds of parks that I listed earlier, there is a debate about whether or not these national parks, so many of them being present, should actually be called state parks, or as we would call them provincial parks, because, in fact, they may not meet the international standard for a national park such as we know it to be, like Banff national park or Jasper. They're much smaller parks, but they are also operated by the national government. There are hundreds of them, and there is maybe some devolution in Australia going to happen from the national to the state level, but that doesn't mean that they're looking to privatize them. They're very proud of the parks system they have.

10:30

I think that we should be so proud of them here as well and that we look to protect them under the public system, that allowed them to flourish in the first place. We should be looking to grow that system and attract greater numbers of tourists to the province to ensure that the maximum number of individuals come from other parts of the world to enjoy our natural wonders and to spend as much time as possible, especially during the more pleasant motoring months, and ensure that they tell somebody else to come as well.

I know that the time that I have spent on our Alberta roads and highways, ending with an evening in a campsite at a provincial

park, is one of my favourite things to do. I hope to do some of that this summer within Alberta, as all Albertans are asked to do, to staycation in Alberta and take advantage of our natural beauty and our provincial parks and consume alcohol responsibly, as the amendments to Bill 2 suggest that we are quite capable of doing. And I agree wholeheartedly, but I also want to make sure that that parks system that we are drinking responsibly in is one that is maintained within the public system and that is not allowed to be frittered away into private control for perpetuity by way of long-term leases and operating agreements that end up diminishing, in my view, the reputation of the parks system that we now proudly have in the province.

If anything, in my view, Madam Chair, the government should be looking to expand our provincial parks system rather than devolving it into an in-name-only publicly owned but still leased in perpetuity, privately operated parks system. I don't think that we want to see, you know, KOA-branded provincial parks mapped all over the province. I believe that that's not the direction that Albertans want to see their parks system go in. We proudly pull into a provincial park, whether it be Long Lake provincial park up by Boyle or Lac La Biche provincial park around Lac La Biche or areas around Skeleton Lake, where I used to go camping as a Boy Scout, or Wabamun Lake provincial park, very, very popular.

But they're in high demand. There's a lottery system, almost, for getting a camping site either as a group or as an individual in this province, so if anything, Madam Chair, the provincial government should be taking to heart the high demand that they're not meeting as a provincial government and increasing the number of campsites that not only residents of this province can enjoy but that international tourists and interprovincial tourists can enjoy as well. It's a lost amount of revenue that we should be developing more. I know that it certainly wasn't within any of our plans as a government, that we held from 2015 to 2019, to diminish the number of provincial parks.

Of course, the demands of the international and interprovincial campers were high and growing then. Right now it's a bit of a lull, but that's a good opportunity to plan and change the picture, knowing that the landscape will change, knowing that that demand is going to be there, and knowing that we have a product here in this province that is an internationally high-in-demand product for natural spaces to enjoy. We have them in great number, and they have a great reputation.

But I think we should be able to attract people off the beaten path of the Trans-Canada highway or, you know, going to Banff and Jasper, which, of course, are jewels in our crown, but there are greater opportunities even further up, going up highway 40 towards Grande Cache and into the lake district, up towards Lac La Biche and beyond. I've taken the highway all the way up to High Level and into the Territories and further on, then, almost to the Arctic Ocean and Inuvik. The opportunity to get tourists to travel in those directions I think is something that we should be really taking a strong look at.

I'd love to see a circular route that would be connecting Fort Smith to Wood Buffalo national park and down to Fort McMurray so that you could travel up through Fort McMurray, past Lac La Biche, and head over to Fort Smith and then, of course, back to the highway that leads up to Yellowknife and down to High Level so that you could encourage, on a summer drive, the tourists who are travelling in a camper van that is a highway-equipped vehicle to travel safely on a new route that would be a wilderness route but with all the comforts of a modern camper van and to include provincial sites along that new route as well.

Think ahead of what and where the target is, and think about what the opportunities are for us to expand our provincial campgrounds

rather than handing them off to private operators in a way that other countries such as Australia would be shocked at. There's just no thought about doing that there, and their hundreds of now national parks are evidence of that commitment. I've enjoyed many of them and would certainly go back again, if the opportunity presented itself, to travel another part of that country using a camper van as well.

I encourage everybody in the House to certainly support Bill 2.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020. It's good to see that the folks across the aisle are going to support it, yet for some reason they can't stop talking smack about it.

The problem is that they're not that well organized when they are talking smack about it, Madam Chair. For example, the previous speaker just talked about how people, Albertans would like to get into the parts of the public land, the parts of Alberta that are off the beaten track. Well, I will remind the hon. member that when the NDP was in government, their environment minister was going to sterilize and essentially not allow any people in the entire west country, the whole part that's off the beaten track, effectively attempted to sterilize the whole Castle, the part of southern Alberta that was off the beaten track, the very things where the hon. member that just spoke said that Albertans would like to go. Well, under this government they're going to get to go there. Under the NDP government they would never get to go there again. So your wish is granted, hon. member.

To the member that spoke before, he complained about beer and bragged a little bit about the great job that he did at trying to support brewers. I don't doubt that the hon. member was trying to support brewers, but the fact is, Madam Chair, that the hon. member just wasn't very good at it. If you go on Google and you google "NDP loses in court on beer," man, do you get a lot of things popping up because they lost repeatedly. He might have tried to do things for the brewers, but they were illegal. You'll find that if you do that, you'll see that three Court of Appeal judges were unanimous in saying that the plan under the previous NDP government to charge the same markups for all brewers but offer a grant to local ones violated the Constitution. That is why I would say that while he might complain about how our government is dealing with brewers, the hon. member, when he was in charge of it, really wasn't very good at it.

10:40

In fact, if you look further under "NDP loses in court on beer" – that's for the folks at home; just google this: "NDP loses in court on beer" – you'll find lots of hits because they lost on beer several times because they weren't very good at supporting brewers. In fact, they lost at the Court of Appeal: Alberta's top court of appeal dismisses beer battle appeal. You know, in fact, we in opposition tried to tell them: maybe you should do this in a way that doesn't break the law. But they wouldn't take our word for it. They wouldn't take anybody's word for it. In fact, they went back to the court where they lost, and they lost again in their own court on an appeal. So I would say that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo may not like the way we deal with brewers, but our efforts haven't been called illegal yet by judges repeated times.

Further, I remember, you know, talking about the difference between what we do and what the NDP does. In fact, the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks has said several times when asked in question period why we're doing some of the things: well, under

the NDP at great expense they were having firewood flown into some of the campsites in a helicopter. And the same members that talked about some of the things we're doing to make it easier for Albertans to get there are saying that it's going to be more expensive. Well, I can't imagine that anything we're going to be doing is going to be more expensive than flying firewood by helicopter. Now, I've got a pretty good imagination, so there might be a way to do it, but let me just say this: it's probably going to be hard to make a campsite more expensive than flying in the firewood by helicopter, as the NDP were doing. Now they're complaining because we're not flying in the firewood by helicopter anymore. It's amazing.

Now, the other thing that I think we heard: the previous member, from Edmonton-Gold Bar actually, shock of shocks – and I appreciate this – finally admitted that we're not selling parks. He knows we're not selling parks; he said it out loud. But just for that hon. member, if he's listening – or maybe his colleagues will let him know – he said that one of the problems was that half the camp spots in the parks were closed. Well, have we got a treat for that hon. member. Just today, Madam Chair – just today, not yesterday, not tomorrow, today – we announced that stage 2 happens on Friday. If you go on the Alberta government website, alberta.ca, and you click on opening up after COVID and you click on stage 2, you will find that it says: parks are fully open this Friday.

While I appreciate that the folks across the aisle are talking smack about the legislation – although I do appreciate the fact they're saying they're going to vote for it; I actually do genuinely appreciate that – all I'm suggesting is that while and before and during they're talking smack about it, they should do a little homework, because the things that I'm referring to weren't very hard to find. Those things show that the arguments being made from the other side of the aisle just don't hold water.

So good news: we haven't been found illegal with the way we're dealing with brewers; the parks will be open this Friday; we won't have to fly firewood in with a helicopter.

I look forward to the support from the other side on this legislation.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I have some mixed feelings about the bill because, you know, of course, I have different experiences over my lifetime with alcohol in public places. So while I have some support for what I think is a mature decision around Albertans making decisions about their own responsibility in a public place, I also have concerns about the fact that I know that that's something that needs to be monitored for a great number of people.

I certainly know that I have had positive experiences; for example, going to Quebec City during their summer festival, which takes place just on a hill above the Plains of Abraham, a famous historical place in the history of Canada, where they essentially allowed everyone to buy alcohol on the open street and walk down the streets, talk to each other, and so on. Being there with my young children and enjoying a beer while we went around the crowds and saw the entertainment and listened to the music and so on: it was a very positive experience, and therefore, you know, it encourages me that we're allowing the sale of alcohol in places where people can enjoy it in a responsible way.

On the other hand, I've had experiences, particularly in some of my camping experiences – I've done a great deal of camping in Alberta and hiking mountains and so on in places like the Kootenay Plains or the Whaleback or Mosquito Creek or places like that. I've had the unfortunate experience of camping next to people who

brought in significant amounts of alcohol and spent the whole evening making it an unpleasant experience for everyone around them. I think we've all had both those kinds of experiences. While I welcome this particular legislation that allows people to responsibly drink alcohol, I would have appreciated some form of description of how we were going to encourage the responsible drinking and to discourage the irresponsible drinking. I expect that that's something that will still need to happen over time.

I know that one of the things that makes a huge difference between, you know, positive experiences with it and negative experiences with it is the culture we have around drinking, whether drinking is something that just simply enhances the activity that we're engaged in or becomes the focus of the activity that we're engaged in. I certainly would hope that the province of Alberta will spend a little bit of time and energy on encouraging a mature, responsible attitude toward public consumption of alcohol. I know that I would love to have the opportunity to go to parks and enjoy a glass of wine or a beer or a small dram of whisky with my family and friends without having to violate any park regulations and so on.

I also want to take some time – I know my time is short this evening – to talk a little bit about our ongoing concern that the number of parks in this province is being diminished by the government and therefore, you know, will be cutting into the possibility of enjoying alcohol in the parks. And I know that the Minister of Transportation has expressed concern about a lack of facts, in his expression, when people say that the parks are for sale, so that is something I will not say. I do have six other things I will say about it, though, just to add to the facts: that is, we know that parks will have their protected area status removed; we know that sites removed from the parks system would have their legal park designations removed and could be opened for alternative management approaches; we know that 37 per cent of the parks in Alberta will be impacted; we know that the majority of Albertans do not support this announcement; we know that 10 sites will be closed to public access; and we know that parks facilities and assets will be sold and management authority transferred to third parties.

So he can say that we're not selling parks, and I guess I will concede that fact to him. But I think, then, he needs to concede the other six facts that I just read out, that in fact what we are doing is moving away from a system of public parks to a system of privatization; therefore, restriction of parks, selling off assets, and taking away the restrictions and the regulations which protect those parks so that ultimately one day it is possible that some of that land will actually be sold completely into private interests. All of those are facts, and I think it's important that they be on the record at this time. You can say that you're not selling parks, and then you can do everything to make it possible that in the future that's exactly what will happen. That, I think, is the point of our argument today, that that's moving forward.

I know that the minister enjoys, you know, telling the off tale about firewood being brought in to some parks in a very expensive way. I appreciate that if that kind of thing has happened for some particular reason, we may make a choice to stop doing that kind of thing, but it hardly requires that we diminish and reduce over 200 parks in order to stop one helicopter from flying. We could simply have said that that will not be a practice anymore. It's well within the regulations. It doesn't require a bill. For whatever reason, something like that may happen. I don't know the circumstances. Perhaps, in fact, it was not flying firewood into the parks. Maybe it was doing the inspections and the park protections that are necessary, and while they were doing it, they threw in some firewood so it would be available. But I would hope that the

minister was not misleading us in terms of the intent of how that firewood happened to be on a helicopter. But I know that that, if it was a problem, could be addressed by simply changing patterns of behaviour and changing practices and regulations.

10:50

Having said all of that, I do hope Albertans enjoy the opportunity to consume some alcohol in a park in a responsible way, that the government supports that responsible new culture of alcohol consumption, that isn't about being a yahoo and wrecking everybody else's enjoyment, and that the government takes responsibility for the facts that they are diminishing the number of parks and affecting 37 per cent of the parks' land status in this province through their misguided legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 2?

Seeing none, shall I call the question on Bill 2, Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. Is there anything else we need to do with Bill 2 at the end of Committee of the Whole? Are we complete, all of that?

The Chair: Perhaps we need to rise and report.

Mr. McIver: Okay. I move that we rise and report. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. Carried.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been a good evening. We've made some progress. I appreciate the debate from all sides of the House. At this point I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, June 10.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:53 p.m.]

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