



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, June 15, 2020

Day 31

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.

Monday, June 15, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 3(1.2) I wish to advise the Assembly that there shall be no morning sitting tomorrow, Tuesday, June 16, 2020.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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 10: Mr. Loewen]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Barrhead-Westlock-Athabasca.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Pretty close.

The Speaker: Two out of three ain't bad.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and voice my support for Government Motion 20 and to recognize that Alberta gun owners are law-abiding people that are being unfairly targeted by an ineffective federal gun ban. There are numerous issues with this federal decision, but the most glaring is that this legislation does absolutely nothing to solve the problem it aims to solve, which is gun-related crime.

I think all legislation and policy should be grounded in facts. Gun crime has been fluctuating every year and is at a slowly increasing rate. In 2017 there were 7,660 firearm-related violent crimes and 1,175 break-and-enter crimes utilizing firearms. However, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of these crimes are committed with illegally obtained firearms, and this is directly correlated with the dramatic increase of guns being illegally smuggled into Canada from the United States.

In 2017-18 751 guns were seized at the Canada-U.S. border. Now, those are just the reported confiscations, but many, many more guns make it through the border undetected by border agents. According to the CBC they are hidden in gas tanks, trunks of cars,

in luggage, or on someone's body. In one case firearms were smuggled through a public library that straddles the border with the U.S. You might wonder why these guns are being smuggled into our country at such high volumes. Well, the answer is very simple: it's very lucrative. A firearm purchased in the United States for around \$200 to \$300 will sell on the streets in Canada for around \$3,000.

In addition to being illegally smuggled across the border, illegal manufacturing of firearms has also gained in popularity in recent years. In December 2018 police shut down a firearm manufacturing ring in Ontario and confiscated what are called ghost guns. These are firearms assembled from parts obtained illegally and without serial numbers. Also, in addition to this, the new technology of 3-D printing has made simply printing functional guns and gun parts possible.

All of the people who have possession of these guns, whether illegally manufactured or smuggled in across the border, are criminals. They are unlicensed, they do not care about our laws, they do not plan to become licensed, and they will not stop committing crime because Trudeau and his Liberals ask them to. What, then, is the effect of Trudeau's new gun ban? Essentially, Mr. Speaker, it criminalizes law-abiding citizens, and it does absolutely zero to stop the gun crime that I just talked about.

If the Trudeau Liberals want to see an actual decrease in gun-related crime, perhaps they should stop going after law-abiding Canadians and their guns and go after the actual criminals. There's a huge problem on Parliament Hill: politicians putting forward policy that doesn't actually address the problem, is not well-thought-out legislation, and is simply virtue signalling. Liberal virtue signalling is an old political game, politicians wanting to be seen as doing something while actually accomplishing nothing to solve the issue at hand. Albertans are getting really tired of this type of partisan posturing, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government is trying to give the appearance of addressing gun violence but is failing to do anything to reduce criminal access to illegally obtained firearms. Meanwhile all law-abiding Albertans are left to suffer the consequences. The firearms being banned are arbitrarily made illegal without any forethought to consequences, collateral damage, or all the work Albertans go through to obtain guns in the first place, so let's take a few minutes to talk about what our law-abiding gun owners go through to carry and maintain ownership of their guns.

The first step is taking a safety course, which is the Canadian firearms safety course. Additionally, if you'd like the restricted designation, you'll also need to learn the Canadian restricted firearms safety course. Both of these courses cover topics such as safety practices, ammunition, operation, firing techniques, care of firearms, responsible use, and safe storage. Both of these courses cost money to take and take around a day to complete.

The next step is the safety exam. It has two components: a multiple-choice and a practical firearm-handling portion. The written multiple-choice has 50 questions, and applicants must score at least 80 per cent to pass. The practical portion requires that applicants demonstrate working knowledge of three different types of firearms, such as pump action, lever action, or bolt action, under various conditions. The applicants are critiqued, and an 80 per cent is required to pass.

Once all the testing is complete and paid for, the prospective firearm owner will then need to submit an application, which involves a variety of background checks and an in-depth investigation as necessary. This process takes approximately 45 days to complete. Additionally, those wishing to have a restricted firearms licence for handguns, semiautomatic rifles, et cetera, must apply for an authorization-to-transport licence, which usually

requires a membership to a gun club, which, again, incurs further cost.

So, Mr. Speaker, this lengthy application process involves courses, written testing, practical testing, significant time and financial investment, and it all takes place over multiple months. Our system works, and it shows. The hard-working, law-abiding citizens who choose to undergo this testing and application process do it for good reason, and the federal gun ban only ignores their dedication and respect for the law while doing absolutely nothing to combat the actual issue of gun violence.

Another consequence of this heavy-handed ban is that owners of gun shops and clubs are harmed. Many rural constituencies, mine included, have gun shops and clubs that rely on the revenue from gun sales and memberships to maintain operations. These are livelihoods of families and in some cases lifelong businesses that span multiple generations that may likely have to be shut down. This is simply inexcusable. This blanket ban is hurting Albertans, but it is especially affecting rural Albertans.

With all this said, I do think it is important that our government does what it can provincially to prevent law-abiding gun owners who use guns for hunting and sport from falling victim to further heavy-handed, ineffectual bans from the federal government. This is what subsection (c) in the motion actually refers to, Mr. Speaker.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly . . .

- (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.

This is why I stand with the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General in actively supporting the provincial appointment of a chief firearms officer for Alberta.

We need to continue to explore areas to assert our provincial jurisdiction over these matters so that we can protect legal gun ownership while also tangibly improving the safety of Albertans and protecting the rights of law-abiding gun owners.

I'd also like to commend our government for forming the Alberta Firearms Advisory Committee, which is chaired by the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat. This committee will consult on and recommend provincial policy, with a mandate to protect responsible firearms ownership by law-abiding Albertans. This committee includes many key stakeholders such as farmers, ranchers, hunters, trappers, shooting-sports enthusiasts, and business owners.

7:40

Mr. Speaker, this is an excellent step in the right direction to protect Alberta gun owners from more federal overreach. Motion 20 is critically important, and Albertans are looking for us to protect their rights. This is why we must stand for what is right. We must push back against ineffective federal policy that seeks to virtue signal, and we must recognize the economic impact that this will have on those who rely on this industry for a living. I am proud to stand in this House and declare my support for Motion 20, and I would encourage all members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me really great pleasure tonight to rise and speak in favour of Government Motion

20. The fundamental reason is my opposition to the recent decision by the Trudeau government to prohibit the ownership and use of many legally acquired firearms by licensed, law-abiding citizens.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of reasons for my opposition to this federal government decision. Firstly, it will do nothing to improve public safety. It will have a negative economic effect on many Albertans and Alberta businesses. It will prohibit and interfere with many Albertans enjoying and pursuing their passions as gun enthusiasts, sport shooters, and hunters. Most importantly, it will further erode our freedom without any measurable public benefit.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I was 13 years old, I bought my first firearm. I had saved up for quite some time working on the ranch in the summers. I'm not sure how hard I was working, but I managed to save up \$50, and \$50 was what I needed to buy the firearm that I'd been eyeing up. My mother took me to our local town – it was the town of Beaverlodge – and I got out of the car. I remember walking down the street, headed into the hardware store, and I went up to the gun counter. Of course, I was very familiar with that gun counter. I had been there quite a number of times. I finally was able to ask the clerk, who I knew well, if he could bring down that CIL single-shot 12-gauge shotgun. That's the one I had looked at, that's the one I wanted to buy, and I had the money to do it. I gave that kind store clerk \$49.95, and then I paid another few dollars for two boxes of shells. I had the gun in one hand and the shells under the other arm, and I walked out of that store and down the main street in Beaverlodge, found my mother, who was running errands, and we got into our vehicle and headed home.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say this. People in our community had and continue to have a deep sense of self and personal responsibility. That's essential if we are going to be given freedoms, if we're going to take freedoms and have the privilege of enjoying these kinds of freedoms. I know that today is a different day, but my point is this. Back in those days, in spite of easy access to firearms, our communities were safe. Our communities were law abiding. We did not fear being out at night even though a 13-year-old kid could go buy a firearm. I bought a single-shot shotgun, but I could have bought a semiautomatic that possibly could have been prohibited in the recent federal gun ban.

Mr. Speaker, for law-abiding citizens access to firearms did not make our communities unsafe. That's my point. Now, again, I recognize that that was a different day. Today we have a training requirement in the purchase, acquisition, and licensing process. My colleague from Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock did a good job of explaining the rationale and the process in that training. I'm in favour of those licensing requirements because there are folks that want to buy guns today that maybe haven't had the privilege of the training that maybe many of us did back in the day, maybe many of us in this room.

See, my father was an avid hunter, and he was a licensed guide, actually, for a period of time. He took the time to show me and my brothers and my sister proper gun safety. In fact, he took the time to show us the various safety features. For firearms owners in this room you'll all know that the number one safety criterion, the safety factor is muzzle control; you always treat your gun as if it's loaded. That was the number one thing that my father taught me, and I was not alone. Friends and neighbours had parents, fathers and mothers, aunts, and uncles that showed them gun safety and gun responsibility, and when that was combined with a deep sense of incredible sanctity and dignity for human life, the combination of the safety training and the deep sense of care for other people provided an incredible level of protection and safety for gun owners in my community.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that in spite of the fact that we were safe in our communities back in the day, even back in the day when a 13-year-old kid could go out and buy a shotgun at MacLeods, walk downtown with shells in one hand, gun in the other to his parents' car – we were safe; we felt safe – the reality is that since then, in spite of the fact that all of these firearms that the federal government is now prohibiting were on the streets, gun crime in this country has declined by almost four times in the last 40 years. That's significant. We have a solution looking for a problem, and it's an ill-founded solution.

Statistics show, of course, that the vast majority of gun crimes in Canada occur with the use of illegal or smuggled guns. In fact, smuggled guns from the U.S. are used in 70 to 99 per cent of crimes involving firearms in this nation, depending on municipality. That's very, very significant. That means, Mr. Speaker, that all of these firearms that are now being prohibited, the chance of those firearms actually ending up in a crime is next to nil, statistically insignificant. Banning legally acquired firearms owned by law-abiding citizens will not improve public safety, full stop.

Mr. Speaker, the only reasonable logic from the industry, certainly from feedback I've had from gun owners and from industry participants and enthusiasts, is that this list, the list that the federal government put together, was basically put together based on the appearance of the firearm, if you can believe it, and not even on the functionality. If the federal government really wanted to ban the common weapon that was designed and built as a mass weapon of war, they would have banned the .303 British. That's probably the most prolific weapon that's out there that was actually created as a weapon of war.

Now, a great number of the firearms that have been prohibited are modern sporting rifles that have been designed for efficiency and accuracy. Many hunters who purchased a more modern firearm for efficacy and comfort have been instantly criminalized. Families who purchased these as subsistence hunters or choose the lifestyle of harvesting their own food may not be able to afford to replace these firearms as hunting rifles on average cost between \$750 and \$2,000.

Now, I mentioned that this gun ban will also have an effect on Albertans and our economy. In Grande Prairie-Wapiti, in fact, in the city of Grande Prairie we have a great new business. It's called Bullets & Broadheads. Many here – the right hon. Premier knows where that place is. It's an excellent store. It includes a shooting range. It is owned and operated by enthusiastic, entrepreneurial, hard-working Albertans who ventured their capital, worked hard, risked a lot to establish a business. Their business is now in jeopardy because of this nonsensical gun ban. In fact, 40 per cent of the long gun sales at Bullets & Broadheads will now be prohibited. This is a business that was just formed within the last couple of years. This also results in a domino effect right back to the suppliers and manufacturers that are being forced to move their operations out of Canada and closing their doors. Mr. Speaker, at a time when this nation desperately needs investment, we're chasing law-abiding citizens and investment out of the country, and that's unacceptable.

7:50

Within the range rental fleet of Bullets & Broadheads they now have six popular firearms that can no longer be used. These firearms are currently being used in an extremely safe environment and used only for sport. Mr. Speaker, this gun ban will prohibit and interfere with many Albertans enjoying and pursuing their passions as gun enthusiasts, sport shooters, and hunters.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have two brothers who, I would say, are a couple of the most law-abiding, responsible individuals you could

ever meet. They're involved in their communities. They're deeply involved in their families' and their friends' lives, in nonprofit organizations, and in their church. They're also gun enthusiasts. They collect them, they sport shoot, they shoot at 500 metres, they shoot at 1,000 metres, they trap and skeet shoot, and they hunt. They do it safely, and they do it responsibly, and they pass on the interest and passion and training and great respect to the next generation. Now, I don't want to rat those guys out, but the fact of the matter is that with this gun prohibition, they're going to be ducking and hiding. That's the reality. And they are not an outlier in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency. They would be more the norm than the outlier. The firearms ban will turn some of our most law-abiding and responsible citizens into criminals before the law. I find that completely unacceptable.

This gun ban further erodes our freedom without any public benefit, and for that reason I support Government Motion 20.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Seeing none, it appears to me that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays and Minister of Transportation would like to speak to Government Motion 20.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of Government Motion 20 because I believe in public safety. I believe in keeping the world safe, and I can tell you that the federal government's actions under Prime Minister Trudeau will do no such thing as keep anybody safe.

I just am disappointed at the action. I'm disappointed at what had to have been a lack of thought that went into it. I appreciate that for all federal parties Toronto is important because they want to get elected. I mean, I grew up an hour and a half's drive down the road from Toronto, and I know that that city is full of good people. I also know that they're being sold a bill of goods by their federal government, that this gun ban is going to make them safer. Bad news for them: this isn't going to make anybody safer, whether they're in Toronto or Vancouver or Calgary or Edmonton or Halifax or rural Canada anywhere. No one is going to be safer because of this. It doesn't take a very deep dive into the facts to know that that's the case.

Mr. Speaker, they're going to ban 1,500 types of guns. Now, from the research that I've tried to do here, in 2018 the total of firearms homicides in Canada was 249. Well, just statistically, if they're going to ban 1,500 types of guns – if the research I've done is correct, the number of those guns that were registered when there was a registry is north of 90,000, and I'm told that no one knows how many more, so I think it's easy to say that there are over 100,000 guns of the 1,500 types.

Now, first of all, these aren't the ones that are committing crimes, but even if you try to give the Prime Minister a little bit of slack, let's just say that all 249 of the homicides in the year were out of those. The percentage of the guns that actually committed a crime – well, it's probably zero, in reality – in the worst case scenario is way less than 1 per cent. It's a foolish waste of money for no net gain. I don't think it's a real stretch for people, whether they support this motion or not, to imagine that criminals don't register their guns, criminals will surely not turn them in, and criminals don't follow the rules when they own the guns right now.

Of course, law-abiding gun owners know that the rules are just astounding for gun owners. You can only largely take it from your home to the shooting range and back. You have to have it double locked all the time. Despite what you see on TV with gangsters that stick a gun in the front or back of their pants – that just sounds like

a terrible idea to me for a whole number of reasons – the fact is that that would be breaking the law here in Canada because you have to have two locks, which essentially is usually a trigger lock and some other case or package or something else that locks over top of it, in order to be legal except when you are at an approved firing range and you have a gun licence. So the type of people that commit crimes are not the ones that are going to have their guns seized. They're not the ones that are going to turn them in, Mr. Speaker.

The Prime Minister would be wiser to spend the money he's going to spend on the guns to maybe have somebody tighten up the border a little bit. I think we all know examples where the border between Canada and the U.S. is severely porous. Here's the other thing that the Prime Minister should know. If you put some more patrols on the border – about a hundred per cent of the guns that you get illegally are at some risk of committing a crime. So rather than going after the less than 1 per cent of guns from duck hunters, who are tax-paying, law-abiding, Canada-loving citizens, why not actually make an effort to seize and catch some of the guns coming across the border? And while you're at it, whether those people that you check have guns or not, remind them to self-isolate for 14 days, which is another place where the federal government has been falling down.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government would do just as much by banning knitting needles or razor blades or sharp sticks or rocks or baseball bats because they're operated by law-abiding citizens as well.

A friend of mine who has a gun store in Calgary, the Shooting Edge, J.R. Cox, a former Calgary Highlander, you know, somebody that spent some years of his life defending our country and is as solid a citizen as you can get, suddenly had hundreds of thousands of dollars of inventory that were illegal. He paid for it all. I don't know what he's going to do, but I'll tell you what: the Prime Minister of Canada owes him a big cheque and a huge apology, but he also owes a huge apology to hundreds of thousands if not more Canadians that went to bed one night as law-abiding citizens and woke up the next morning as criminals without doing a single thing wrong.

Well, last time I checked, this is Canada. This is a free democracy. This is a place where people get to determine how they spend their time, how they recreate, that they can hunt game in the wild places of this country. Making them into criminals is the worst idea in a bad-idea factory that's come out in a long time. The bad-idea factory would be the Liberal government in Ottawa, just in case anybody was wondering.

Member Irwin: Oh, good thing you clarified.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I appreciate my colleague from across the aisle appreciating that clarification. I'm grateful that you were listening.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that if this was going to keep anybody safe, we could think about whether it was a good idea, but it's clearly not going to keep anybody safe. It goes against some of the very principles that make Canada a great place to live: the fact that you can own property, the fact that you can make your own choices, the fact that if you buy something that's legal today it should be legal tomorrow or the government is actually the one that's at fault. And that is the case here.

I hope all members of this House see their way clear to support this motion because the alternative is not good. If you let people take property away from law-abiding citizens today called "guns," we can all only guess what they'll want to take from all of us tomorrow and the day after that. Pretty soon we'll end up in a place

that we won't recognize as Canada anymore, and I think this is a good place to stop that negative slide.

8:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Seeing none, it appears to me that the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon is rising.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Government Motion 20. I have it in front of me here. It speaks to this Legislature and asks for support with regard to recognizing that the criminal use of firearms primarily involves unlicensed individuals often using illegally smuggled firearms. It asks to express our opposition to the government of Canada's recent decision to prohibit many classes or types of guns and rifles, and it urges the government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to assert our provincial jurisdiction, including replacing the Chief Firearms Officer with somebody appointed by Alberta rather than at the federal level.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that I have never had a possession-acquisition licence. I'm not a hunter, never have been. I'm not a sports shooter, nor am I a firearms collector. I've never owned a firearm, period. I should be the perfect example of somebody that would stand up in support of what the federal Liberals are doing rather than standing up in support of Government Motion 20. If you can't convince me, then I don't understand why anybody would be supportive of the federal government's actions.

I'm not in support of the federal Liberals' orders in council because I believe these orders in council attack the rights of Alberta gun owners, I believe it oversteps the jurisdictional rights of our province, and I believe that it ignores the real problem of illegal guns and criminal activity. I will be speaking in favour of Motion 20 because I believe that it does call this Assembly to recognize that the criminal use of firearms by unlicensed individuals is the real issue. I will support Motion 20 because it calls upon this Legislature to take all necessary steps to assert provincial jurisdiction. I will support Motion 20 because it recognizes the constitutional right to property ownership. But mostly I will support this motion because my constituents have clearly said that they do not support the order in council by the federal government that would ban many of the firearms that they lawfully enjoy and own.

I will grant you that my knowledge on this issue is limited. It's limited to some degree, so I've taken the time to talk with my constituents. I've talked with the hunters and the sportsmen and -women in my constituency, I've talked with the collectors across my constituency, and I've met with the stakeholders from the gun community in the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency over the last several weeks. I've taken the time to visit a gun shop in Edmonton, and over a period of two hours I had the opportunity to ask question after question and to see the guns that were in question and try in some small way to understand why this federal order in council would move in the direction that it's moving.

I've tried to understand why one rifle was to be banned versus another rifle that was not going to be banned, and I must confess that after all of this conversation, after all of this discussion, after seeing rifle after rifle placed before me, I walked away quite confused. It would appear to me that the criteria used to revoke legal ownership revolved around whether the gun had been used in a past killing or if it looked like it was but actually was not a military firearm. Time after time I was shown one banned rifle and then another that, while it might look different, was the equivalent firearm, yet it was not banned. I have tried to ascertain the logic, the

rationale, behind this order in council, which will confiscate the property of law-abiding citizens, and I'm not sure that there is one. I'm not sure that there is any real logic behind this.

Of all of the people in Canada, it is the gun community that is perhaps the most law-abiding of citizens. The paperwork that they have to go through, the courses that they have to take, the safety measures that they must pursue in order to own a firearm are significant, and it speaks to their commitment to the safe use of firearms and the willingness to uphold the law of this land.

As I have talked and researched the issue, I have come to the conclusion that the action of the federal government and their order in council are not based on a consistent or logical consideration of the facts. It is not a consistent or logical course of action that promotes community safety. Rather, this is a misguided reaction to a serious issue of illegally smuggled firearms being used by the criminal element within Canadian society, and they're doing so by going after law-abiding citizens. This order in council ignores the real issue, and it attacks the rights of law-abiding citizens to their property and to the enjoyment of that property. I cannot support that.

Prime Minister Trudeau's federal government has implemented a grossly misguided ban on something like 1,500 firearms and politically championed this as necessary by riding on the coattails of the tragic Nova Scotia shootings, which were done by an individual who had illegally – illegally – obtained the guns that were used in committing these heinous murders. This order in council would have done nothing to stop this tragic event or ones that would be similar in the future. Not only has this ban been implemented by an order in council, but the Prime Minister has also stated that his government is working on bringing forward gun legislation that will give municipalities the power to effectively ban firearms within their city limits. This is clearly an attack on provincial rights. Municipalities are squarely within the jurisdiction of the provinces. Municipalities are a creature of the provincial government. This action is an example of the federal government encroaching on provincial rights as outlined in our Constitution. Clearly, this is overreach by the federal government, and it must be opposed, and it will be opposed by this MLA.

Rather than addressing the very real issue of gang violence, rather than addressing the very real issue of illegal guns that have been smuggled into the country and find their way into the criminal element, this order in council goes after hunters and sportsmen and -women and collectors and law-abiding citizens. I have concluded that this is not about public safety; it is about a belief that the Canadian public cannot be trusted to own or use a firearm, and that is a conclusion that I cannot support. I do not believe that this will make Canada a safer place in which to live. It will simply mean that the criminal element will be armed, and the general public, the law-abiding public, will be unable to protect themselves or pursue the recreational side of firearm ownership.

For this reason, I will support actions by the government of Alberta that are within its jurisdiction that will mitigate the impacts of this federal order in council. The reality of our nation is that we are a federal system of government. Our Charter outlines what laws the federal or the national government can oversee and which ones the province can oversee. While firearms laws generally tend to fall into federal jurisdiction, where there is an opportunity for provincial intervention on this issue, I will support the assertion of provincial jurisdictional rights as they relate to firearm ownership.

8:10

I will support the appointment of a chief firearms officer from within Alberta. This will provide a buffer between Albertans and Ottawa on this issue. I support the creation of a Firearms Advisory

Committee. This will meet with Albertans to provide recommendations on how Alberta can better assert areas of provincial jurisdiction while respecting law-abiding Albertans' long history of responsible firearms ownership. I will work to further improve firearm governance in Alberta that will crack down on illegal use. I will support the establishment of a provincial firearms examination unit to speed up testing of guns that have been seized as evidence in criminal investigations.

In other words, I will support the rights of law-abiding citizens to own a gun, and I will support efforts of this government to address the real problem of gang violence and illegal guns. Finally, I will work with my constituents and my federal counterparts of like mind to repeal these infringements on Albertans' rights. These actions make sense, these actions are measured, these actions will move us towards a safer society, and these actions respect the rights of Albertans. So it is my pleasure to support this Government Motion 20, introduced into this Legislature by the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of Government Motion 20. I want to be able to talk about this not only as an MLA and from hearing from my constituents but also from 10 years in the Edmonton Police Service and some of the things that I came across, situations that I saw, and try to add in that perspective of it. I think we can all agree that we want safer communities, that we want to see a reduction in gun violence. We can all band around that. That's such an important thing to want to start with, that we all, as Conservative or NDP or Liberal, want safer communities. The question I have to ask myself is: will this gun ban actually achieve that? The answer is simply: no, it will not achieve that.

As a police officer I actually never feared law-abiding gun owners. I never was concerned about them. I never had to deal with them. In my time in policing I came across a number of firearms in my day-to-day work, all illegally possessed with no licences, poorly stored, or used in crimes. The reality is simply that you need law-abiding citizens if you want this order in council to work. The only people who are going to follow these rules are law-abiding citizens. We need to make sure that we truly understand that, that criminals will not listen to this. If you have law-abiding citizens, they are going to store those guns safely, they're going to use them safely, and they're going to use them appropriately. It's going to be criminals that ignore this. It is an obvious flaw in the order in council and the direction that the federal Liberals are taking.

And to go a little further, when Trudeau says that you have a two-year amnesty on this in which to dispose of the firearm over a two-year period, you can't convince me this is about safety if you still have two more years with the firearm. Like, if it is so dangerous, they should be coming to get it today, they should have had legislation ready with a buyback program immediately: "This gun is so dangerous that we are prepared to buy it now. We're prepared to come get it now." But they didn't do that, so what I suspect, of course, you know, for the federal Liberals, is that they're simply trying to make this an election issue, that their concern is not safety. They need something that they can talk about in the next election that takes the focus off their record and things that the Liberals have done in the past. They need something that they can talk about for the suburbs of Ontario, probably, where it might be different opinions on this, but it's not about safety.

With that, there are a few incidents I came across in policing. It was a summer night. My partner and I get into a car chase. I told this story once before, but I'll tell it quickly again because it's a little ironic now. We get into a car chase. It's pretty brief. He was running a lot of red lights, and we end up stopping him in a parking lot. When we stopped, he took something off, and we didn't know what it was immediately, but when he got out of the car he was wearing a vest, and it had pockets like a tactical vest with four or five prohibited magazines, 20 rounds each, fully loaded. We ended up arresting him. He took off a Kriss Vector rifle, so it was sitting on the front seat. He also had a bandana that was tied so that it would go above his face.

What he intended to do that night, I don't know, but he was prepared, it looked like, for battle, basically, with the number of rounds he had, prohibited magazines. He already had a court order not to possess a firearm. Of course, he was not licensed but still in possession of it anyways. It was a Kriss Vector rifle. If anybody's familiar with what a Kriss Vector looks like and what the design is, it's meant to be a smoother gun to shoot in that it doesn't force your gun up, it actually forces the pressure down so you can stay on target longer. The ironic part is that when I look at the banned list, it's not on there. So a criminal with a Kriss Vector rifle ends up getting a conditional sentence order, which is, in my opinion, the equivalent of a slap on the wrist. It basically says: please don't do this again. He had a long criminal history. So part of this, to me, is the court's approach to this: basically, it's not effective. I would use different words, I guess, in different places, but it's not effective, it's not a deterrent, and what he got was a slap on the wrist.

The rifle he had is not even considered to be banned, but the rifle I own is banned. With 10 years as a police officer, I have hundreds and hundreds of hours of training using a firearm, and, you know, now I'm being told that I can't safely store these weapons, I can't safely use these weapons. Then I think of some of the small-town detachments of the RCMP. I mean, where are they going to train? If you can't take this to a civilian range, the carbines that the RCMP have, I mean, where are you going to practise with those and become more proficient with them?

In my time in policing I've come across, in some traffic stops, firearms just sitting on, like, the front passenger seat, in one case with spent shell casings all around the vehicle, so I don't know if he was shooting out the window or not. But, basically, it's just a firearm sitting on the front seat. We've had traffic stops where there are shotguns under the seats. I had one where we pulled an assault rifle – I know you don't like to call them that; I just did out of habit – an Armalite rifle out of a back seat with about \$100,000 in wrapped cash, clearly, you know, in the business of drug dealing. These are the folks that we came across with those weapons. They're the ones willing to use them, they're the ones willing to commit crimes with them, they're the ones that we should all be nervous about and scared of, and they will not listen to this order in council. This simply just changes the balance of who has firearms, from the law-abiding to the criminal.

Like, I've never lived rurally, but hearing some of your stories about some of the situations you find yourself in in rural Alberta and some nerve-racking events – at least when I policed in Edmonton, I knew the next guy was only 30 seconds away if I got into trouble. But if you're, you know, on a rural property, and you're sitting out there, and it's just you and your family, and now somebody's on your property and they might have a firearm and they might challenge you with different weapons or something, like, what other choice do you have, right? It puts you into a position where you don't want to be, but you've got to be able to defend yourself if need be. What I worry is that we're changing the

balance so that law-abiding citizens no longer have the option to possess firearms.

But what Trudeau is also saying is that he just doesn't trust you. That's another issue to me. We have to trust the citizens of this country to be able to follow some basic rules. We talked about licensing; that is necessary. I have no problem with the licensing requirements and the training that goes into that, but if we're not going to trust Canadians and trust adults to be able to store these weapons properly, possess them properly, and use them safely, then what are we going to trust them to do? I mean, where does that end? There are lots of incidents that lead to loss of life or to an accident. I've seen it. I've seen far more fatalities with vehicles than with firearms. They're all tragic, but we have to trust each other to be able to handle these weapons properly, be able to use them safely, and to respect the fact that it's a way of life for some folks.

8:20

I mean, not everybody is going to see the enjoyment in it. I personally enjoy skeet shooting. I've grown tired of shooting at a paper target, but that's just from doing it repetitively in law enforcement. But for some people that's a nice day out.

There are a lot of businesses that thrive on that, as the Minister of Finance had touched on. I think he mentioned that 75 to 99 per cent of guns are smuggled in. I can tell you that when I searched for the serial numbers on restricted weapons that I had seized, they didn't show up in a database because they were smuggled in, so you didn't know the origin of it more often than not, or they were stolen from a different part of the country. So these guns are still getting into the hands of criminals.

We're not going to prevent that, but one of the things that we can do, I think, is focus on mental health. I think there's an aspect there that is attached to gun crime, which is mental health. I didn't understand the prevalence of mental health until I got into policing, and I know that most people have different backgrounds and that, but just to see actually how bad it is in society is really eye opening. That's something that has really stuck with me, working on mental health.

But we have to go after organized crime. We have to go after smugglers as well. There's a lot of focus that we can put into reducing gun violence and criminals from having guns, but we have to have that focus in the right spots. Trudeau has really missed an opportunity to work with gun owners, the industry, and people who advocate for bans to find some middle ground and to find real solutions in being able to reduce gun violence. It's too bad that he swung so far in one direction as opposed to, really, just listening and being able to come up with a solution that's going to make the streets safer. The unfortunate part of this is that if he is successful at confiscating all of these guns, which I don't believe he will be, but if he is successful, it will only be the next day that another one's coming across the border, and then where is that going, and what is it going to be used for? That needs to be considered as well.

I'm out of police stories – I'm sorry – that at least I think I can share here anyways, but I think that I've made the point. Smugglers, the border controls, organized crime, and mental health as well are all ways that we can build safer communities.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 2

Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 2, the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020.

I would like to thank all members of this Assembly for their input and debate regarding this bill. To recap: Bill 2 proposes amendments to the act to modernize a number of Alberta's liquor laws. This legislation removes unnecessary restrictions on liquor sales, promotes responsible drinking in parks, and cuts down on unnecessary red tape. These amendments are a clear signal that we are serious about making sure Alberta has an open and modern regulatory system. These amendments will have a positive effect on municipalities and licences by eliminating unnecessary processes and getting rid of cumbersome rules.

Together these changes represent a conscious effort by our government to review, simplify, and modernize legislation across the board, but they also reflect our commitment to eliminating red tape and removing roadblocks for businesses. This change makes the legislation current and clear and provides more autonomy to municipalities, with the final say to allow or prevent liquor sales in their communities. Municipalities will still be able to prohibit liquor sales through bylaws and can object to any licences for liquor sales in their jurisdiction through the AGLC.

The amendments also include providing a single, streamlined process for municipalities and Métis settlements to respond to an application for a liquor licence in a community that does not already have one. They will also reduce restrictions on liquor consumption in parks and allow municipalities to determine whether public consumption in their parks will be allowed. This is about creating clear legislation and giving communities direct control of their jurisdictions, and we're doing this with other aspects of the legislation as well.

We're making it more efficient and less costly for municipalities to respond to liquor licence applications in their regions. Municipalities and Métis settlements will no longer be required to hold a vote of their electors when receiving the first application for a liquor licence in their jurisdiction. This is a very rare occurrence, but when it does happen, it is costly and time consuming for these communities to hold a vote. However, communities still may wish to hold a vote on an initial liquor licence if they deem it in the best interest of the residents, but it will no longer be a requirement. This change will save municipalities and Métis settlements time and money while affording them more autonomy. It also reduces red tape for the province and AGLC by making it easier to grant liquor licences.

Lastly, we are proposing to lift restrictions on public liquor consumption in parks. This would mean that park owners could allow public liquor consumption without food in designated picnic areas and within our parks. This would apply to municipal parks, privately operated parks, as well as picnic areas in provincial parks and recreational areas. If passed, it will ultimately be up to the owners and operators of any given park whether or not to allow liquor consumption in marked areas. So unless it is made explicitly clear through signage, Albertans should assume it is not permitted, but this amendment is about giving responsible adults the ability to enjoy a drink out in our provincial parks and eliminating red tape that hampers municipalities and landowners from making decisions for their community members.

These proposed amendments, along with aligning how and when AGLC can impose conditions on licences for each of its three core businesses and clarifying that liquor can be used as a raffle prize, reflect our ongoing commitment to modernizing the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act and cutting any red tape associated with it. We will continue this work when we introduce more updates to the gaming, liquor, and cannabis regulation in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Alberta's businesses want to grow here in our province free from the red tape that prevents them from doing so. I'm proud that our government is honouring our commitment to ease the burden on Albertans. I would like to thank the members of the House who support this bill as well as those who offered their input.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move third reading of Bill 2, the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has moved third reading of Bill 2. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate this evening? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise this evening to speak to Bill 2, the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020. I haven't had the opportunity to sort of get some thoughts earlier in the debate, but that's okay. You know, more or less we support this bill going forward, but I would like to add some comments, I think, going forward. The associate minister had mentioned that, you know, maybe there are some changes coming in the future, so hopefully some of these comments that I make will be thought of during those pieces of legislation as they're developed.

Essentially, what we're looking at in Bill 2 are changes to how liquor is consumed in parks – I'm going to come back to that one in a little bit – liquor licence approvals, licence conditions as well as raffle prizes. I just want to look at the liquor licence approvals. We're talking about streamlining the processes there, which I'm sure nobody would disagree with, obviously, Mr. Speaker. If there's a way that we can make things a little more swift, a little less cumbersome on people, that is always a good thing.

I have to admit, though, that looking into this a little bit, I hear that the Cardston area had a prohibition on liquor since 1950. Man, that's commitment, I have to say, but I would have been curious to have found out how they might have felt about this change. The good news is that at least it's still up to them at the end of the day, which is good, but just out of, I guess, curiosity, I would have liked to have known what they thought about this piece of legislation getting changed.

8:30

Around the licence conditions allowing, you know, for instance, applying certain conditions on a new bar that's opening up in, say, a high-crime area where we might require a coat check, a bag check, both: I think these kinds of things are appropriate and not necessarily something to really be concerned with. At the end of the day it's about keeping the patrons safe within the establishment, using that example. I don't think there's any disagreement there.

Then around the raffle prizes, allowing this to be a little bit clearer around that being allowed, although I understand the AGLC was already doing these kinds of things anyway, more around housekeeping.

When I think about these three things here, Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm kind of wondering: did we actually need a whole piece of legislation to do this?

I suppose, you know, if you're potentially trying to explain to Albertans why a ministry is going to cost them \$13 million over the course of the next four years, you probably want to have at least something to show them for results, which brings me now to the other change that this bill does, and that's around liquor consumption within the parks. I suppose I could look at this as a bit of a way for the liquor industry within Alberta to be able to sell some extra product within the province, which is probably a good

thing that will help them make some money, create jobs, things like that. I guess I wonder, though, when there's another section of the government that is making changes to our parks which could potentially work against all of that hard work. I'm sure the industry is very happy about this. I'm wondering if they're sitting back going: there's half of me over here that's excited, and the other half is like, "Uh-oh, am I going to lose part of that volume?"

Maybe as a suggestion moving forward – one of the things I had an opportunity to do, Mr. Speaker, was go around the province a little bit talking to some of our craft brewers. I have to say that some of their facilities are absolutely amazing. But one of the big things that I was hearing from them during the time of talking to the ownership, one of the things they didn't bring up was: wow; I really wish I could sell more of my product so people could drink it in our parks. What they were saying, though, was: I really wish I had better access to other provinces in Canada like all the other provinces have access to Alberta. That is where these businesses will have the opportunity to grow. I was actually surprised to learn that for a lot of them it's easier to sell down to the United States than it is to our neighbours right here in Canada.

When I think about red tape reduction and Bill 2 here, I'm wondering: could we not have worked on something around that? That could be, you know, some kind of really solid thing to hold up to Albertans and say: you're spending \$13 million here, and here's how we're getting some benefits from that. I know that we have reduced some of the barriers, apparently, for everybody else to come into Alberta, and then we hoped that they would drop those barriers in the other direction, and I think we're still waiting, Mr. Speaker.

I would've liked to have seen some time spent on, say, for instance, something like that or maybe some of the reporting that our craft brewer industry is saddled with. Their, you know, financial reports over the course of the last three years: a lot of that is duplicate information that the federal government requires. I'm wondering why we're potentially duplicating some of that. Perhaps there was an opportunity to maybe look at reducing some of that burden on our liquor industry rather than, perhaps, maybe solely focusing on liquor consumption within parks.

I realize that that was part of a commitment in the UCP platform. I guess some of the members have said that the war on fun was going on, so we wanted to make sure that people had fun. I think we have a lot of opportunities with which to grow our industry, but I don't think that it lies just within our park system. I think we have opportunities to grow if we can get access to other parts of our very own country rather than, say, for instance, somebody managing to get their product all the way to Ontario only to have it sit there for six months before it even hits the shelves. So, you know, why aren't we working towards helping those industries to grow in those areas, which I think will be some significantly more volume than simply allowing our parks to be consumption sites as well? Again, that's assuming – all these parks that are potentially up for changes, whether it be privatization or maybe ultimately even being sold off – that consumption will continue to be even allowed in those areas.

Like I said, I do support Bill 2 and the changes. Sometimes it's, you know, better to support a little bit rather than nothing at all, but my hope is that as we move forward with maybe some more changes, some of those will be around access to other jurisdictions, where I think there's a lot more opportunity for our liquor industry to be able to grow there, create jobs, and maybe we can continue to look at some of the ways to reduce some of the paperwork that they're saddled with. You know, I think we can probably do things like clarifying language about raffles in statute amendment acts, Mr. Speaker.

I'll urge all of my colleagues here in the House to support Bill 2 going forward, and I look forward to hopefully maybe taking part in a very nice craft beer in one of our parks, assuming they're going to be there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 2, Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020. I don't know where to start on this. It's good to see the government is bringing some changes, how Albertans can actually really enjoy their public parks.

From my own experience working in communities, a number of organizations, hosting many of the events, I can say that Albertans do enjoy parks, specifically in summer. This is something very critically important to their health, well-being, and their lives. We have seen this even in this pandemic. When we are going through this very historic time, people are anxiously awaiting for the parks and places to be open. We have seen that people are just running to drive to the parks, and they want to use any opportunity, any little opportunity that they can to enjoy the parks.

The government claims they are providing, they are helping, they understand the significance of the parks in the lives of Albertans, the people, and to me I do support part of what the bill purports to focus on, to provide or increase the opportunity for Albertans, to ease some of the, I would say, process where people can better enjoy their lives, and they would have better opportunities.

8:40

Even though I know there is a kind of mixed reaction in public in this – there are people on both sides of this – I have been part of a number of occasions where we have the provisions in the legislation where people could apply for the licence where they could serve beers on the grounds of public places, and the community organizations do practise that. But then I see also reactions from one side of the community. They don't kind of feel like big fans of this. They say that the young children run around those activities, and they don't want to kind of promote this kind of product. And then there are, you know, the people that are in favour of this, and they say that this is something that really helps them have the event and set up enjoyment once a while in life or once a year in their lives.

The question in my mind is seriously trying to understand the equation. The government brags about it, that the government does understand. I remember the occasion that the Premier did tweet about the significance of the parks, public places, and the well-being and the health of the people and the communities, but at the same time we have been simultaneously, I would say, discussing something really contrary to this, where the government has, you know, taken steps, really, opposing what we are discussing here, suspending the environmental reporting. And we are discussing the bill where we are closing or partially closing some of nearly 20 parks, and then there are other numbers. About 164 parks: they will be privatized, or we don't know what will happen to them.

I know the members opposite, you know, have their argument, and the Premier before the election actually made the comment – I'm very sure it was the Premier. When he was questioned and asked about what his plan is to reduce the Alberta debt, he brought in the argument that it can be paid off by selling off some of the Crown lands. Those comments were really opposed by a number of

the organizations in Alberta. One day we're discussing this, and I don't know where the problem is. I'm trying to look into the contrast. On the other hand, we really amplify the significance of these public places, public parks, environment in the lives of many Albertans.

In the province we have seen, again, that the government in this province does not understand. When we see it took so long during the pandemic – the government took on little support to no support when it comes to ordinary people. I discussed in this House and provided the feedback on the government's one-time bridging the gap program, and on behalf of the many business people – like, before getting elected to this House, I also was operating my small-scale business. I was not only operating my business but was actively involved in my community organizations. The small businesses were, you know, waiting for weeks and weeks to hear back. But it's still not clear. There's a lot more to go.

On the other hand, the UCP government party, the ruling party, did kind of feel the strain and the impact of COVID-19. That is the only provincial party, I believe, in Canada to come up with the decision that they're going through a tough time and that this was a time for them, for their party coffers and party circles – it was an issue of their survival, you know – to access public tax dollars.

So what I'm trying to say, the question I have in my mind, is that I would wonder if the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction would – I don't know – like to highlight some of his ideas on this or answer this. I said that in fact I like the idea. You're moving forward. I would have appreciated it if they would have even – I personally am in favour of this bill as a community member. It also gives you feedback. There are both sides of the argument in regard to this bill. That would have provided a little more opportunity for the people to be heard, to get the voices on both sides of the argument, and then also would have provided the opportunity to bring a little bit more education and awareness on this issue and eventually would help us strengthen the work we are doing here.

When we understand the importance of this bill and the land and the environment and the parks, why don't we understand that we are moving forward to privatizing the public parks? Some of those parks are very close to being privatized. I know this is the ideological stand of the government that they claimed before the election. They are willing to sell the land. I know that the parks are not for sale, but the Premier himself, before becoming the Premier, said that that is one of the options when it comes to paying off the debt.

So those are some of my comments and questions. I would be happy to see if the associate minister or any other minister can just, you know, shed some light on these issues.

Other than that I would have been happier if I would have seen not only the government proposing something like this but also bringing some kind of argument into this or a proposal into this on how this bill is also going to boost Alberta businesses specifically related to beer and breweries and the people who are involved in this industry.

The previous NDP government took some steps that helped the beer industry. Relatively, I would say that it was a good time. They also worked to expand the market access for them, working on some of the challenges with other jurisdictions in Canada, like B.C. and Ontario, and working to cut taxes related to the industry to help provide support to the people involved in the industry.

8:50

These were some of the steps. I don't know if they were enough, but they were quite helpful, the data shows. They provided a huge expansion to the brewing and distilling industry. When you were drafting this bill, when you were moving this bill, was this

something similar that was in your mind, and if it was not, like, why was it not? How is it going to help our brewing and distilling industry? And if you could not focus on this, this was probably due to the lack of consultation. That is something where every time, when we stand up in this House to provide our feedback on a piece of legislation that we are discussing, consultation is something that we always see was probably not enough or that many times was missing.

In my experience I was not only part of the organizations; I was one of the leading persons that helped build the umbrella organizations in my communities, bringing a number of communities together. I saw lots of challenges, hesitation, people afraid of right-wing, left-wing ideologies, and different competing groups. All it took was for me to initiate the conversation with people. There was no way that I experienced a setback to my idea. Rather, we achieved the one organization. The two competing organizations were not even willing to sit together at one table but ended up bonding together and have been working together since 2009, and still today they very successfully run some of the sports events. I would like to say that when we discuss this and bring up the matter of consultation, to me this is very important from a very different point of view.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Seeing none and presuming that the hon. Member for Sherwood Park is just awaiting his chair, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 2 as I've not yet had a chance to speak to this piece of proposed legislation. As always, it's been a few days since I've risen in the House, and I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the hard-working folks on the front lines, those who are working in health care and other essential services right now. We can't forget – I know it feels like we've been in this time of COVID for so long – and we need to acknowledge that they continue to do so much and risk so much for all of us. Thank you to any of those who are watching tonight at home.

To speak to Bill 2, the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, 2020, I want to talk a little bit – if you've been listening intently to some of my colleagues, you've likely heard that many of us are in favour of a lot of the elements of this bill. You know, we're not always against every piece of legislation that's proposed in this House, but I do want to outline a few of my concerns and echo some of the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Meadows as well as from my colleague from Edmonton-Decore.

Now, what is Bill 2 all about? Well, there are a couple of things that are key that, again, some of my colleagues have already spoken to: allowing for liquor in parks, allowing for, essentially, liquor to be consumed in parks without food; liquor licence approval, streamlining some of the processes at the municipal level – I know my colleague mentioned the prohibition of booze in Cardston, as an example. The historical background there is quite fascinating to me. In fact, as a former social studies teacher I'd like to actually learn a little bit more about that. I imagine the member from the area, you know, has spoken to, has consulted with, and has heard from many folks within his own riding as well. Some of the licence conditions as well, allowing the AGLC to put a condition on any new long-term licence.

But what I really want to focus on is the fact that this piece of legislation – I should first say that, I mean, I'm not opposed in principle to a lot of the changes that I'm summarizing in a nutshell, of course. This piece of legislation is being introduced so that Albertans can enjoy their parks, enjoy their public parks. We know – the numbers clearly show it – that Albertans do enjoy their public parks. They love their public parks, in fact, and they are, in this time of COVID-19, in this time of the pandemic, flocking to their parks, to our parks, in record numbers.

So we've got, on one hand, a government that is showing that they're relaxing some restrictions in public parks. They're encouraging Albertans to get out there and enjoy those parks, yet what are they also doing? They're making sweeping changes to parks. Now, those sweeping changes that they made to parks were actually not made through legislation, interestingly enough. You know, if you take what happened with, I guess, the stroke of a pen with the privatization, the 175 parks that are slated to be closed and/or removed from the Alberta parks system, and you compare that to this piece of legislation, which is, in a nutshell, restricting regulations in parks, it's very interesting that we didn't have a chance to debate those broader, more sweeping changes to provincial parks. Those changes impact 37 per cent of Alberta's parks, 74 per cent of Alberta's provincial recreational areas are impacted, and numbers from CPAWS indicate that approximately 32 per cent of campsites may also be closed, particularly impacting the Kananaskis area.

Now, I know we've heard in this House questions from my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, our environment critic, asking the minister about these changes, and of course he was responded to with denial and being told that parks aren't being sold off. But what's happening? They absolutely are being either closed, removed, or privatized. Now, we can stand in this House and we can share the outrage that's happened in regard to those changes, again, that weren't made via legislation – we can do that – but I can also assure you that I've gotten so much correspondence on those changes to Alberta's parks. In fact, I held an online town hall with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and we had hundreds of Albertans tuning in to share their concerns. Truly, I've gotten correspondence on a lot of things in my short time in the House. Bill 207 was definitely one that I got a lot of correspondence on and on pensions a lot of correspondence, but right up there, top three, is parks.

So I'm curious about this government that is, on one hand, encouraging Albertans to get out and enjoy the great outdoors and then, on the other hand, jeopardizing Alberta's parks, opening parks up for perhaps, you know – I guess it's similar – unrestricted access. I don't know. I mean, we're not fearmongering here. There are just a lot of concerns that Albertans have raised to us.

It was interesting, you know, when I've talked to folks about Alberta's parks system, how many just talked about how integral their experiences in parks were growing up and how for so many Albertans going to a park was something that, like I said, was such a monumental part of their childhoods.

9:00

I look at the list of parks that are being impacted, and I can think of my own childhood. There is a provincial recreation area near a place called Freeman River, if anyone knows where that is. It's not far from Fort Assiniboine, where my dad lives. I grew up in Barrhead, so we spent a lot of time in the Freeman River area. Freeman River is a tributary of the Athabasca River. I think about the time we spent in that river and in the site around the river, and I think about future generations that might not have that opportunity, right? These parks may be sold off. They may become inaccessible

to folks. You know, we didn't have tons of money growing up, and it's a relatively inexpensive way to enjoy the great outdoors.

Again, I question, you know. This was a change. The changes to Alberta's parks happened in the midst of a pandemic, and this is why we've spoken out so strongly against these changes.

I want to use this opportunity to note that while I support many of the changes outlined in Bill 2, the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Amendment Act, I'm concerned about the approach this government is taking to parks writ large. I think it's an opportunity. I guarantee you that if in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'm being inundated by e-mails on parks, I can imagine the other members in this House, those from the government side, are receiving them as well. I'm happy to be proven wrong. Someone can stand up and tell me otherwise. But I'm doubtful because this is something – it's interesting. You know, when I was in my online Facebook Live with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I got some messages as well from people who are, like: I'm not an NDP supporter; I didn't vote for you guys, but I care a whole heck of a lot about Alberta's parks. I'm sure my colleagues – I see my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud nodding as well. I'm sure she received similar messages.

This isn't a partisan issue. This is about protecting our natural heritage. This is about conserving for future generations. So I guess I stand to warn the members opposite. You know, I'm not going to pre-empt the decision of this House, but I can imagine that this bill will be passed, and I want to urge those members opposite to be wary of going out to their constituencies and bragging about how they've been able to increase enjoyment in Alberta's parks, because I'm quite certain you'll hear from constituents who say: yeah, that's great, but why are you privatizing, why are you selling off, and why are you delisting – if that's a better word to use other than “selling” – 175 parks, then?

I hope – I hope – that that will urge the government members to think about reconsidering that decision that has been made, because, again, that wasn't made via legislation. We weren't able to debate those sweeping changes to Alberta's parks, many of which have been, you know, preserved areas for decades in our province. We weren't able to discuss that. We weren't able to debate that. You weren't able to bring the concerns of your constituents forward, nor were we on the opposition side.

To close, I'd like to just reiterate: you know, push your cabinet ministers, push your minister of environment to reconsider those changes. Again, I'm hoping I can hear from some of the members opposite who might prove me wrong, but I'm certain you're hearing from your constituents on this issue as well.

Yes, I support the intent of Bill 2, but I don't support the continued attack on Alberta's parks, and we're urging you to stop your ideological sell-off of our parks. Again, if you were really serious about improving our public parks, about getting more Albertans out, especially in a time where we can't be gathering in traditional ways – and that reminds me. I was talking to somebody just the other day about the fact that Edmonton Folk Fest is cancelled. Edmonton Folk Fest: much like Calgary Folk Fest, I know thousands and thousands of Edmontonians gather here on Treaty 6 territory every year for Edmonton Folk Fest. What I was talking to somebody about the other day is: how many of those folks who would have typically attended folk fest are now going to be going camping and getting out of the city?

I think about just the increase in numbers that we're going to see as the summer actually commences. Google data has already shown that numbers have risen as far as parks attendance, and it's not even summer yet. I can only imagine that the numbers are going to increase dramatically. You can bet on it. *Hansard* has captured my prediction that we will see record numbers of folks accessing our

parks this summer. What does that say to me, and what should that say to all of us? That this should be a time when we should be expanding Alberta parks, that we should be expanding opportunities for Albertans to access the great outdoors and be able to do so in a physically distanced way. I'm worried. I know the online parks system gets inundated as soon as camping reservations are open, as an example, so I'm worried there's going to be an inability for Albertans to even be able to properly physically distance at some of the provincial parks this summer.

I also hope that it's an opportunity for Albertans to go out and explore maybe some provincial areas that they've not explored before. You can look at the map. Our friends at CPAWS have created a map that shows – well, they've got maps that show all the provincial parks across the province, but they've also got maps that show the ones that are slated to be delisted, privatized, or sold. I don't believe all of those changes have gone through across the province. I think that in some cases it's a staggered approach. Don't quote me on that, but regardless it's perhaps an opportunity to explore some of those outdoor spaces before they're all gone.

My hope – perhaps all my cynicism and my idealism hasn't been killed yet – is that we can reverse some of those changes, that the members opposite will acknowledge, will recognize how important our parks are, and they'll push their minister of environment to reverse some of those changes, because he can. If he was able to implement them with the swoop of a pen, then he'll be able to reverse them as well.

Again, I will end because I think I've urged the members opposite enough this evening, but again, if you're serious about your support of Alberta's parks, you'll show it in other ways.

With that, I will end my remarks. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for a brief question or comment. I see the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has risen under 29(2)(a).

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I felt the need to rise today in response to the comments just made and, frankly, the comments we've been hearing ever since this legislation was tabled and, really, ever since our First Session of government, which is that our government hates the environment and that we don't support parks and a whole bunch of lies. So I think there's a lot of information that I'd like to address. Sorry. I respect that that is unparliamentary, and I will actually apologize on the spot, but I feel like there's a need to address a lot of what's been said.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is correct when she says that we probably go home and we get e-mails and questions about why we're privatizing parks. She's right. We do get e-mails about why we're privatizing parks, but the reason we get those e-mails is because our NDP opposition is spreading misinformation that is factually inaccurate. We are not privatizing parks, nor are we selling off parks, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct that we are getting these e-mails, but the truth is that we're not getting them for any factual reasons.

If we look at the numbers, it is true that we are removing some parks from the park system, but all of these park areas combined represent .3 per cent of parkland in Alberta, which means that 99.7 per cent of parkland in Alberta still remains as parkland. We have not gotten rid of half of the parks in Alberta, and as someone who represents Alberta's most beautiful and probably most sought after and well recreated parks, which is Kananaskis Country, I can tell you that our government loves our parks. We wholeheartedly support them. I want to be clear on the record that 99.7 per cent of Alberta's parklands are staying within the park system.

9:10

If we go further into that, that minuscule .3 per cent of parkland that is being removed from the parks designation into the Crown land designation is not being privatized. In fact, if you look at what we've done specifically, it explicitly states that in the partners we're looking to find to help us manage these park spaces, we are looking for municipal governments, First Nations governments, or not-for-profits. Last time I checked, no three of those would count as privatization, nor would any three of those count as selling off parks. Last time I checked, municipal governments are governments who are duly elected, as are First Nations chiefs and band councils, and not-for-profits and our civil society are highly respected and in a great position to manage these areas.

Nowhere are we selling off parks. Nowhere are we privatizing parks. The only parks that we are moving from the system represent .3 per cent of parks. If we actually look even beyond that, sure, we have admittedly removed the .3 per cent of parks from the parks system, but we've actually, since taking government, invested an additional \$10 million to further conserve 22,000 hectares of extra environmentally sensitive land. Mr. Speaker, I mean, we've put our money where our mouth is. We've done what we need to do. We are working with parks to ensure our parks are well supported. We are enabling Albertans' ability to access recreational spaces, and we've actually invested 10 million extra dollars to further conserve extra lands.

The hon. member also spoke about, you know, increasing Albertans' access to safely recreate and their ability to access our park spaces. I mean, if you want to talk about putting our money where our mouth is, we also have committed to funding a wildlife overpass, the first one outside of a national park in Alberta's history, to make sure that Albertans can get to their parks safely. We've funded wildlife fencing on highway 1 to make sure that Albertans can get to the parks safely. We're looking at, you know, a train that could potentially go from the Calgary airport to Banff to get extra cars and congestion off the highway and get Albertans to our parks safely.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to correct a lot of the misinformation that's out there. We are not privatizing parks. We are not selling off parks. We stand with the environment, and we are here to protect the environment.

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

Seeing none, we are back on third reading of Bill 2. Is there anyone else that wishes to join in the debate this evening?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or allow the hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to close debate.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments that have been made tonight. I appreciate the ability to be able to debate back and forth on this issue. Unfortunately, we've heard most of the time, again, some false talking points by the NDP that we're selling or privatizing parks in Alberta. The minister has been very clear that that's not happening. But I want to say that the Member for Edmonton-Decore did bring up some very good points. He talked about the importance of having interprovincial trade and the need to be able to break down those trade barriers between provinces. He was correct when he said that it's easier to sell into the United States than into other provinces.

But I want to tell that member that our Premier was a leader when it came to breaking down those trade barriers when he reduced our restrictions or our exemptions by 80 per cent within the first year of being in office. This is what we're hoping will be reciprocated by the other Premiers in other provinces. It's a shame that we don't

have the ability to have an open trade corridor between provinces throughout Canada. I hope that we will work on that with other provinces, and I hope that they will be able to see our example in being able to break down those trade barriers.

This bill specifically, Mr. Speaker, is about being able to get out of the way of, taking the legislation out of the way of those who actually are in the alcohol business. Also, it provides the clarity when it comes to businesses who offer these things as raffle prizes. It also brings in clarity and also brings in the ability for those areas that have had prohibition to be able to keep it if they would like, but it provides them with the autonomy to be able to have it within their own communities. We think that's where that decision should be made as there is a diverse group of people in Alberta. This is something that we are very proud of being able to bring forward.

With that, I close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

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 7 Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: We are currently, for the purposes of debate and for your information, on amendment A1. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments – let's just go with comments and questions on amendment A1 at this point. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thought I might have an opportunity to introduce an amendment to an amendment, but I understand that wouldn't make sense.

Thank you for the opportunity today to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 7, Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020. In particular, as you mentioned, Mr. Chair, I understand that we are considering today the amendment brought forward by my colleague the Member for Calgary-McCall. The amendment, if I may, just for clarity for my comments, relates to amending section 5 of the proposed bill and, in particular, striking out section 60(3) of the act and substituting the following, so stating:

- (3) A regulation made under this section
 - (a) prevails over any rule that is made or amended by the Regulator with which it conflicts or is inconsistent to the extent of the conflict or inconsistency, and . . .

This is the part that's added in the amendment.

- . . . (b) must be construed so as to uphold existing aboriginal and treaty rights recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and not construed so as to abrogate or derogate from those rights.

I read into the record – and I'm sure it's already been read into the record, of course – the amendment just so we have some context around what the proposed amendment is today.

In particular, as you know, Mr. Chair, the content of this act is to establish within the act the ability for cabinet to establish timelines by which the Alberta Energy Regulator, AER, conducts its business. Right now, as we know, the Energy Regulator, AER, establishes by its rules its own timelines with respect to its hearing processes and its appeal processes, and that's done at the discretion of the AER, establishing those rules. This bill will change that so

that cabinet can prescribe specific timelines through regulation to be imposed upon the AER for how it conducts these hearings.

I want to begin by saying that, you know, I think it is very important – and I know the members of my caucus agree with this – that we have timeliness in how the decisions are made with respect to oil and gas application approvals and that processes should not drag on for so long as to discourage either meaningful consultation with indigenous peoples or to discourage proponents from bringing applications forward. We certainly know that finding that balance between ensuring that there is thorough and appropriate consideration of the application that's before it because of the significant impacts not only of individual applications – of course, I imagine many members in this Assembly are familiar with the processes that go along with these application approvals. It's not just individual applications. Often we're looking at cumulative effects of a number of applications and projects within one particular area.

In particular, I bring up cumulative impacts because that is a concern that has been raised consistently by indigenous peoples for decades, really, and forms the heart of a lot of the legal jurisdiction around the application of aboriginal rights and aboriginal law. For too long not just in this province, in fact, but across Canada projects were evaluated on this sort of individual application basis and looked only at the impact of a particular project that was put forward for approval when we know that that one project, when considered in light of other projects around it or projects that came before it or projects that may come after it – it's really the cumulative impacts of those projects which are a significant concern to the peoples who hunt and fish and exercise their treaty rights on these lands and are indigenous peoples. That's been the foundation of a significant amount of litigation in this area.

9:20

So it's important, when we are looking at project approval processes, that we consider context. We have to consider not just the individual applications and projects before the decision-makers but look at the bigger context. For that reason, consultation is not generally something that can be done adequately and appropriately with specific timelines that apply to all projects and say that all projects should abide by these particular timelines. We know that there are some consultation timelines that are already put into the guidelines that proponents and indigenous peoples follow as part of our oil and gas development regulatory process in this province, but when it comes to the AER's approval of these projects and looking at these hearings, it's important that there needs to be, I believe, some flexibility with respect to how each particular application or matter before it is considered and what is an appropriate timeline.

We want to make sure that projects are considered and are reviewed and that decisions are made in a timely fashion; that, in fact, is the heart of aboriginal law often. We know that the failure to consult in a proper way, an appropriate way has led to the overturning of project decisions and project approvals because we also know that the rights of indigenous peoples, set out in section 35, an interpretation of treaty rights in the Constitution Act, require and demand of the provincial government and the federal government an appropriate consultation process with indigenous peoples. So rushing through a process to meet a timeline, which could be an arbitrary timeline, actually leads to further delays because it could lead to litigation.

While I appreciate that to date I think we've seen that the government tends to like to get into litigation, I don't think they like to get involved in litigation matters which actually stall and delay

the development of our oil and gas projects in this province. We have seen first-hand, as all Albertans have, the impact of failing to consult properly and how that can have a significant delay. We have far too many examples of that already within our province, not the least of which, of course, is the Trans Mountain pipeline and Northern Gateway. Certainly, it then puts an onus on us to make sure that we do this process efficiently and effectively but also in accordance with the rights of aboriginal peoples and indigenous peoples under the Constitution.

I think that perhaps one of the concerns that I have and that my caucus members have with respect to the bill that we see before us is that it is very light on details. It talks about the ability of cabinet, in fact, to make regulations “to establish time limits on the exercise of powers, duties and functions by the [AER]” and that cabinet may also “establish time limits in respect of any process, hearing or decision concerning which the Regulator may make rules under this Act.” But we have no idea – and we won’t know until we see regulations – what those timelines would be or how they would be determined. Is it going to be, for example, one timeline for all hearings? So all hearings must be completed in – and, honestly, at this point I’m just guessing because we don’t have any details in the proposed bill. Would it be that all hearings must be completed in five days? Thirty days? Does it matter what the application is about? The AER has a very broad jurisdiction to consider a number of different types of oil and gas projects. Some are going to be, obviously, more complex than others. Some will be perhaps an additional project based on something that was already approved prior. Perhaps that process would be quite smooth and quite simple. In that case it would maybe be appropriate to be a short timeline.

But we don’t yet at this point have any indication as to how cabinet will determine in regulations what the timelines will be and how they will be determined, what kinds of projects. Are we talking about limitations on decision-making; for example, at the conclusion of a hearing? Is it that the AER has to issue a decision within a certain amount of time? Is it that the hearing itself may only last a certain amount of time? Is it the rules by which the parties may submit their positions and applications at an appeal hearing, for example? We have no idea because there’s so little that’s set out here, and it raises for me significant concerns that this government has not perhaps thought through and won’t think through properly within these regulations.

Let’s be clear. We all know – we’re all familiar now – that regulations don’t come before this House. They’re not subject to that scrutiny. They are done, obviously, through the regulatory processes that government has, but they are not part of the democratic transparency process that we have here. So we have no idea what those will look like, and I fail to have confidence, based on the lightness and the lack of detail provided in this bill, as to how those regulations will be developed in a way that preserves and protects the constitutionally protected rights of aboriginal and indigenous peoples under section 35 of the Constitution Act.

That is why this amendment seems entirely reasonable. It’s simply to state that when regulations are made by cabinet with respect to timelines for approval processes by the AER, those timelines and those regulations must uphold existing aboriginal and treaty rights. In fact, this is a statement that should apply. We should understand all of the exercise of our authorities within this context because we know it to be true, but we need to make it absolutely clear that we are not trying to in any way undermine the aboriginal and treaty rights that are protected under section 35.

To be fair, Mr. Chair, I raise this issue because I believe that it’s an appropriate reminder for this government with respect to their

obligations around consultation. The government has been in power for just over a year, and to date we’ve already had a number of situations which call into question the commitment of this government to fulfill its duty to consult properly and to respect the aboriginal and treaty rights of indigenous peoples within this province. For example, we already know that they had a plan to sell treaty land without consultation.

We know that indigenous people have been criticizing the failure of this government to consult with them with respect to the suspension of environmental monitoring standards, something that boggles the mind to this day. We have our children going back into child care, we have restaurants opening, and you can go get a haircut, but apparently it’s not safe to do environmental monitoring in this province. It’s completely confounding, Mr. Chair, why those prohibitions are still in place. Indigenous peoples have raised concerns with respect to that, because when we suspend environmental monitoring in this province, we are infringing upon their rights. That is absolutely what drives a number of their concerns with respect to the development of oil and gas on their lands. It’s environmental concerns; it’s also their concerns about their ability to exercise their treaty rights on their land. We heard that. There are those concerns right now.

As well, by the way, if I may, Mr. Chair, the indigenous peoples have also raised significant concerns about the suspension of – well, I shouldn’t say “suspension” because I think it’s actually just been absolutely done away with – the province’s long-standing coal policy. Suspension implies that somehow it’s temporary, but I believe it’s permanent. Therefore, you know, I think there are significant reasons why aboriginal peoples will be concerned about this government’s dedication and commitment to preserving their rights.

Let’s not forget as well, Mr. Chair, that not too long ago, in February of this year, Treaty 8 First Nations walked out on a meeting about child intervention and children in care and Bill C-92, which would allow for First Nations and aboriginal peoples to exercise their authority to develop their own child intervention laws to apply on-reserve. At that meeting, held between this government and Treaty 8, the Treaty 8 members walked out because they said that the government of Alberta was not taking consultation with them seriously.

9:30

I think we have an opportunity here, and the government, frankly – the government – has its opportunity here to show its commitment by affirming within Bill 7 that they understand that when the cabinet exercises its authority to develop regulations which may place timelines on the hearings and processes of the Alberta Energy Regulator, they will do so in a way that upholds the existing aboriginal treaty rights recognized under section 35 of the Constitution. I think that this is a very reasonable amendment, Mr. Chair. I think it should be one that, quite frankly, the government should have no difficulties committing to because if the government wants to demonstrate its commitment to protecting these aboriginal and treaty rights, affirming within this act that they are looking to protect – that they understand that obligation within the act should be a reasonable and fair amendment to make.

You know, again, I understand that so much of what we do in this House, Mr. Chair, is about balancing, right? It is about balancing different objectives, competing interests, balancing interests. When it comes to our oil and gas development in this province, it is absolutely a balance that is not an easy one to make, but it is an important one to make. In fact, I would say that we are constantly feeling that tension and that pressure within our province, and this is not a situation – and I continue to and will repeatedly reject the

idea that calling for oversight, transparency, accountability, listening to competing points of view does not mean that we don't actually support our oil and gas industry as well. But there are different interests at play, and the interests that are being expressed are those of Albertans, all Albertans, who have concerns.

We are constantly trying to seek that balance between supporting our oil and gas development in our province, because it is still the bedrock and heart of our economic engine in this province and in Canada, by the way, but it also needs to be done responsibly, and it needs to be done balancing other obligations that we hold as the Crown. Of course, many of you will know that the honour of the Crown is the heart of its obligations to aboriginal and indigenous peoples in this province. That means being committed to upholding aboriginal and treaty rights, and I think that that is inherent upon all of us, to reach that balance appropriately, to reflect that we want timely and efficient decision-making at the AER, yes, but we also need to ensure that the rights of all Albertans, including indigenous peoples, are protected.

I encourage the members opposite to take this amendment to heart. It certainly does not in any way undermine what is already the case. We have a strong oil and gas industry in our province. We also have the obligation to balance it against these rights, and it recognizes that; that's what this amendment is about. I think the government should have no trouble accepting that, and I look forward to a fulsome discussion about that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 7, the Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020, and of course we have an important amendment in front of us introduced by the Member for Calgary-McCall. I think it's very important that we consider and support this amendment. We see in section 5 as presented that there are some sweeping changes to the power that this UCP government is giving themselves to make a regulation with regard to time limits on any process, hearing, or decision the AER can make rules on, quite the change from what's currently presented in section 60.

I'm very concerned, like the last speaker and like many of my colleagues in the NDP caucus, that this government is trying to give itself new sweeping powers in the guise of ensuring shorter timelines for decisions made by the AER, but really I have to ask: at what cost? This government is trying to give itself the ability to make decisions without consulting with the AER. You know, on one hand, I recognize the importance of ensuring shorter timelines, most definitely, but I'm not necessarily sure that this is the best way to get there, by overruling the ability of the AER to do its job in the first place. I appreciate that more needs to be done to ensure that the AER has the ability to meet these faster timelines in regard to moving important energy projects forward, but proper consultation and assessments must always be done, and that is not something that we're seeing within this legislation.

They're giving themselves the power to introduce these – I could call them arbitrary timelines because we have not seen the timelines in this legislation, and they will come further in the regulation. We're supposed to take at face value that this government is going to make the right decisions when it comes to respecting the process and the hearings and timelines that must be upheld through the process or should be upheld, at least, through the process. Well, this

government might not think that's quite as important through the sweeping changes that they're introducing here today.

You know, when I look back on some of the changes that we made as an NDP government over the last four years, we took these consultations incredibly seriously. Specific to the consultations that are being put forward in this amendment, the importance of respecting treaty rights and aboriginal rights as upheld in section 35 of the Constitution Act, it is incredibly important that we continue to uphold those rights, which, once again, is not something that is offered in the legislation that is before us, which is why, once again, I will be supporting this amendment that was put forward by the Member for Calgary-McCall.

I think back to some of the initiatives that we had brought forward in government, you know, increasing indigenous consultation capacity through the indigenous climate leadership initiative, of course, through the climate leadership plan that we had put forward. I recognize that this government, this new UCP government, does not support the initiatives that we had put forward in there, but the fact is that we had invested large amounts of money – and those monies were delivered through the Ministry of Indigenous Relations – to ensure that there were opportunities for these communities to be a part of these consultations, to be a part of improving energy efficiency in their communities and reducing energy costs, to combat the effects of climate change and to improve community buildings and facilities and develop community-based energy supplies, and on and on, Mr. Chair. Those were all important initiatives for us and, even further, to the training and development of people in those communities to better understand the consultation process and the changes that are being proposed by governments into the future.

When I look at this bill as presented to us and the lack of inclusion of aboriginal rights and treaty rights, it's very concerning. Once again, this government is giving itself incredible powers to overrule the AER and just go around them entirely. When I think about the work that the AER is doing across our province, whether we're talking about coal mining, as the last speaker discussed, or controlled wells or dams or drilling across our province or hydraulic fracturing, methane reduction, oil sands production, all very, incredibly important industries across our province, just as important is the need to ensure that consultation is done with all affected parties. That's something that this government is not committing to here today but quite the opposite: they're saying that if they don't feel the AER is meeting their timelines, they don't need to, you know, follow them or, even worse, they don't need to follow them in the first place, let alone give them an opportunity to even be a part of that conversation.

You know, we look to some of the other decisions that this government has made in suspending a number of environmental protections, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud discussed, largely without consulting indigenous people and other stakeholders who are uniquely affected by such changes. Those communities have raised concerns about the changes that this UCP government is making, but unfortunately this government, as shown in this bill, is not concerned at all about the needs of these communities, about the consultation process, about the hearing process.

9:40

I can only imagine that people out in these communities, who, you know, either moved into these communities before energy development was happening or potentially after but maybe didn't necessarily realize to what extent that development would be happening – and they deserve the ability to have a fair and impartial, I suppose, hearing process to at least ensure that their voices are

heard through the process. At the end of the day, the AER or the government might not make a decision based on, though they should, those hearings. At least the opportunity was there. When we see a bill in front of us that says that they can choose what the hearing process looks like or establish time limits in respect to that process in the hearing process, that's very concerning to me, Mr. Chair.

I have to mention that it seems quite ironic that this UCP government chooses to directly dictate timelines for the AER while just recently on the issue of environmental monitoring the government argued that the AER was independent, yet now this government is trying to interfere with their ability to carry out that important work. On one hand, we have the government saying, "You know, the AER made these decisions; it had nothing to do with us," and on the other hand, they're saying: "Well, we don't need to listen to the AER. We'll make these decisions if we want to."

Just further to the importance of consultation and the lack of clarity in this legislation and, really, what I believe is a lack of understanding of what some of the real problems in the industry are and the inability to move these projects forward, I would argue that if we want to ensure timeliness, we need to ensure that there are people in the AER that are able to continue this work. We look back at this government making the decision to, you know, not replace 270 full-time positions since 2019. Fired, not replaced, however it may have happened, there are hundreds of people, almost 300 people, that were in positions in the AER who are no longer there. Well, that is going to hinder the ability of the AER to make timely decisions. So the first thing that we should be looking at is: why haven't those people been replaced? You know, this government may think they know better than the AER – and I would argue quite differently from that point – but the fact is that if you don't have people there, then they're not going to be able to make the decisions that need to be made in a timely fashion.

One of the most important issues of all that is related to this amendment, of course, Mr. Chair, is the importance of ensuring in law that aboriginal and treaty rights are upheld through this process. This UCP government may wish to arbitrarily impose timelines on the AER, but they do not have the right to make decisions without consent from these communities who've had their rights upheld through section 35 of the Constitution Act, which is why, once again, I plan to support this very common-sense amendment that was put forward by the Member for Calgary-McCall.

The fact is that we have many questions left for this government. Even more so, how it relates back to this amendment: just looking at the legislation, I mentioned earlier that the minister hasn't laid out any timelines or plans for timelines of implementation of this legislation in the first place, so I'm not sure if the minister plans to hold further consultation with these communities after the legislation is put in place, after, you know, these aboriginal communities and communities with treaty rights have not had the ability to have their input heard on this legislation.

How this legislation will work with projects with shared jurisdiction, considering that the government is giving themselves so much power to overrule the AER, how cabinet will make decisions and decide which timelines are appropriate: once again, with respect to the amendment that's on the floor, ensuring – you know, this government is saying that they have specific timelines. Well, how is that going to work if you are not consulting with these communities? If you plan to do so, how can you sit here and say that you're going to set these timelines without actually having those consultations with the community? These are all questions that really should be answered by this minister, not only on how it will affect the general community and the ability of the AER to

carry out its mandate but, even more so, questions that need to be answered for those who have aboriginal and treaty rights affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act.

I'm very concerned about what we're seeing here. I'm concerned about how it relates to not only the approval process for these projects but also how it might affect the reclamation process after these energy projects have been completed, ensuring that there's a proper reclamation process in place. I'm not entirely sure within this legislation, but it seems like the government is giving itself the ability to waive timelines for reclamation as well, so I'd be interested to see how that might affect the industry. If I'm wrong on that, then the minister can feel free to rise and correct me. While this is a small bill, it really has some incredibly large changes to the ability of the AER to carry out their work and to the ability of the industry to, I suppose, trust the ability of the AER to give them answers when the government is saying that they could arbitrarily change those answers whenever they want. That's very concerning for me.

Without seeing any establishment of timelines in this legislation and being told that we have to trust that the regulations will be fair to each industry, whether it be the drilling industry or flaring and venting or hydraulic fracturing or methane reduction, anything that is governed by the AER, it is very hard for me to support the legislation as proposed, and even more importantly this important amendment needs to be included in it as well.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to this amendment. Hopefully, I'll have some more opportunities to speak specifically to the main bill, but I'm very concerned about what this bill could mean for the ability of the AER to carry out their work and even more so for the ability of aboriginal and treaty rights to be recognized and affirmed as is shown under section 35 of the Constitution Act.

With that, I hope all members of the Assembly will support the amendment that is before us as presented by the Member for Calgary-McCall. I hope you will support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate on amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to add some thoughts here on Bill 7, the Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act, 2020, and of course, more specifically, to the amendment that's before us, amendment A1. I do want to thank the Member for Calgary-McCall for bringing this forward here.

You know, as I've always said, Mr. Chair, I always get hung up on the language of a bill: what's in there, what does it say, or even sometimes what's not in there? I think what we have here is an amendment to hopefully address what's not there. The reason I say that: you know, I have to look back at some of the things that we've seen happen as of late and why I think we need to give very, very serious consideration to amendment A1. We've heard about meetings that have been conducted with our First Nations, yet we've seen some of those members walk out of those meetings. We think about some of the legislation that's been brought forward recently under Bill 1 and the concerns, the very serious concerns, that have been brought forward by members of our First Nations. I think about the changes to environmental monitoring and the calls from our First Nations to completely reverse those decisions.

Mr. Chair, these are things that have happened in the very, very recent past, so when you have these kinds of things happening, you start to wonder, really: what kind of commitment is there to engage with our First Nation peoples? You know, I've looked at the language – and I know that the Member for Edmonton-West Henday had made mention of this – around potentially changing the timelines that the AER would have around consultations on projects with our First Nations. If the government looks at this and goes, “Well, it's not happening fast enough; we need to speed this up,” well, I start thinking about things like, for instance, Northern Gateway or Trans Mountain. One project was terminated and another one was significantly delayed because of the failure to properly consult and engage with our First Nation peoples.

9:50

The bill as presented right now I think starts to, well, essentially set the government up for potential failure. If they're going to just arbitrarily start changing the timelines – and, again, the Member for Edmonton-West Henday was quite correct in this. One minute we're saying, “Well, the AER is independent,” but then the next minute we're saying, “Well, we're going to tell them what to do.” Well, which is it? Are you going to tell them what to do, or are they independent to do their job? You can't have both. This in itself is conflicting language, Mr. Chair.

But, more importantly, back on amendment A1, I want to really look at what the member proposed here in (b) around upholding treaty rights as recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. I want to look at that date for just a moment, 1982. That's a very, very long time for the people of this country to continue to ignore the treaty rights of First Nations. I'm going to say it: they have been ignored. If they hadn't been ignored, I'm willing to bet that maybe Northern Gateway would have gone through. I don't know. Maybe it wouldn't have, but we certainly wouldn't have seen the problems that happened. Trans Mountain, I'm willing to bet, probably wouldn't have seen the delays it did had there been proper consultation and engagement, meaningful engagement, with our First Nations peoples.

As we're looking at this bill as proposed, Bill 7, here's an opportunity, at least, to start trying to change the channel on how we're doing this. We shouldn't have our First Nations people walking out of meetings on us in frustration. We shouldn't have them concerned about language like what was proposed in Bill 1. They have very much taken exception to this. Had we consulted with them properly, perhaps we would have found out that maybe we shouldn't have suspended environmental monitoring. So I'm struggling greatly here. You know, I'm faced with this very, very challenging piece of legislation. Well, how do I, I guess, make it less challenging? I think amendment A1 will make it less challenging, but we have a long, long way to go, Mr. Chair, around how we interact with our First Nations.

We've got to figure it out. We have to decide, you know: what's it going to be? Is the AER going to be independent? Is it going to be directed by us? I certainly remember, when we were in the 29th Legislature, members that sit on the current government benches and, of course, in the current government caucus arguing profusely on what they perceived to be more powers being handed to a minister or, for that matter, even to potentially the government, yet here we are seeing yet again more powers being handed to a minister.

I'm hoping that by accepting amendment A1, this will maybe be the starting block for how we can begin to meaningfully consult and engage with our First Nations peoples. It's not enough just to show up in a room, make it look like you're listening, and then walk out and say: “Okay. Great. Now can we speed up this timeline, please?

We've just got to get things moving here.” That's not enough, Mr. Chair.

I mean, like I said, the questions are many within Bill 7, and hopefully, like my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday, I'll get a chance to ask some of these questions here in Committee of the Whole. But as we look right now at A1, we have an opportunity, and my hope is to send a signal to our First Nations that we actually are prepared to engage with them in a meaningful way and in a substantive way. We've heard a lot of talk from the government, but just, like I said, looking back over this short period of time, I'm seeing a lot of instances where it sounds like it was a failure to do that.

So I'm urging all my colleagues in the House this evening to accept amendment A1. I'm hoping that maybe even the Minister of Indigenous Relations might pop up here and add some thoughts to this on how this could be a bridge to engaging with our First Nations peoples in a very meaningful way and not rushing the process simply because we picked a date on a calendar and we expect the project to be done at that time.

With that, I will take my seat. Hopefully, we will see some progress on this.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen to join debate.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak to the amendment to Bill 7. I more or less rise to respond – and with the lack of 29(2)(a) in Committee of the Whole, I will take this opportunity to respond – to the remarks made by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore. You know, our government understands how important treaty rights are as well as consulting with First Nations. We took historic moves, including the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, to ensure that First Nations are consulted and involved in the regulatory process as well as the approvals process for any projects. In fact, we have had several meetings, I believe a historic meeting, which a lot of my colleagues were a part of, with bands and councils when our government was first elected. I wasn't a part of that meeting because, I admit, I do not have any bands or councils right in my riding. Obviously, they border most of our constituencies, and we have indigenous peoples living all over Alberta, but for all intents and purposes I do not have any physical reserves in my riding.

You know, it's always a pleasure to get up and talk about these treaty rights and the peoples who first inhabited our land and took care of it for so many generations. We have a duty as a government to consult all Albertans as well as ensure that we can have continued prosperity.

So I will be speaking against this motion, primarily because I disagree with the premise of the member opposite's entire argument. He essentially said that we, you know, failed to consult and that that's why projects were turned down, specifically oil and gas projects, which is demonstrably false given that several First Nations chiefs – and I believe they speak on behalf of their nations better than we do, and I believe that many people would agree with that, including them. Most aboriginal communities actually supported Northern Gateway, and they were mad at Trudeau for turfing it. If your leader, the Leader of the Opposition, the former Premier, had any leg to stand on on this, she would have actually supported Northern Gateway pipeline, but she didn't. She went on public record denouncing the Northern Gateway pipeline, standing in the way of Alberta's prosperity.

10:00

If that wasn't enough, the last LNG pipeline, Coastal GasLink, was supported by every single – all 20 First Nations along the route supported the Coastal GasLink pipeline. In the Trans Mountain case there were multiple First Nations supporting that pipeline very vocally, but unfortunately we only hear from the minority voices there that, quite honestly, are funded mostly by foreign radicals and people coming into our nation to protest our own development.

You know, I don't agree that we have a problem with this right now in Alberta. In fact, this government has taken historic leaps and bounds in order to engage with First Nations peoples and indigenous peoples in this province. The hon. members can shake their heads and deny it all they want, but they had four years to engage First Nations peoples. They could have done this when they were in government. Instead, they failed. They failed on every file, especially this one.

You know, I just want to say that I don't support this motion at all, entirely because the premise is demonstrably false, and any read of any newspaper or something other than, I don't know, the NDP caucus Facebook page would tell you that this is the truth.

With that, I'll resign my comments, Mr. Chair. I didn't mean to be long-winded. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

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

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to the bill proper, Bill 7, I see the hon. Minister of Justice has risen to join debate.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Chair, we've made some significant progress here on this one, and I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 7.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15 Choice in Education Act, 2020

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill at this time? Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bill 15, right?

The Deputy Chair: Yes. Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020.

Mr. Sabir: I got the bill, and actually I will be moving an amendment to this bill that will certainly add some details to this bill, will make this bill a bit better. With that, I have the requisite number of copies of this amendment. Once it's distributed, I will make some remarks on that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Just to remind the House, going forward, what we'll do is that we'll have some of the copies come up to the table, and then if you would like a copy delivered, you can put up your hand. Otherwise, there will be copies of the amendment at the tables on the two sides of the House.

Thank you, hon. member. If you would please read this amendment into the record for the benefit of the committee. Going forward, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

Mr. Sabir: I move that Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020, be amended in section 2 by adding the following immediately after clause (a):

(a.1) by adding the following after the 9th recital:

Whereas the government of Alberta is committed to the principles set out in article 26 of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights, which affirms the right to education.

What this amendment is doing. The universal declaration of human rights – that's a historic document, a milestone document, and we're celebrating the 70th anniversary of that document – sets out 30 different basic, universal rights with a view to protecting human dignity, with a view to promoting peace, with a view to promoting harmony across the globe and the human family. All those rights set out in that document are critical ones, important ones. Many of those rights are also enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the rights that we enjoy, the rights that we cherish, and the rights that make Canada one of the best places to live on this planet Earth.

It's critical that whenever there is an opportunity, we reaffirm our commitment to those rights. But here what the government bill did – and I'm sure that it may have been just an omission. They may not have done it intentionally, but sometimes I think the government, the way it does things, only picks things that may benefit their viewpoint, their views. In this case there are three different sections to this provision of article 26 of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights, and the government didn't pick article 1, article 2. They just went to the final article, 26(3), and this added that the parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. Certainly, that's an important right, a critical right.

However, many things – I will say that English is not my first language, so sometimes when I hear things like “cherry-picking,” I may not get the context. I may not understand them perfectly because, as I said, it's not my first language. But in the way that out of 30 provisions the government picked one provision, I think that helps me to understand what cherry-picking means. That's the perfect example, I think I would argue, of cherry-picking, that out of 30 different provisions, they just wanted to use one line that may support their argument here.

The other things that are enshrined in that article 26: I'm sure that every member of the House will agree with me and I do recognize that every one of us in our ridings have schools, every one of us in our communities have children, in our families have children, and we do want to make sure that they have the best opportunities to be able to be successful, the best schools to go to, that they have schools they can choose from, education they can choose from, that they have private schools, they have francophone schools, they have public schools, Catholic schools. With that, I think it would be good, would send a clear message that the government is not just cherry-picking one line but that they are committed to all the principles that are enshrined in article 26 of this universal declaration of human rights.

I will read what this amendment is trying to include. I will read the text of article 26. Article 26(1) says:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be made equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

10:10

The second provision says:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights

and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

The third provision says:

Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

So what I would suggest is that sub (3) is somewhat predicated on the first two provisions that are included in article 26. I think we can all agree. I don't see that government MLAs will have any issue with including this provision because we can all agree here, regardless of what side of the House we sit on, that everyone has a right to education. On all sides of the House I always hear passionate arguments about how education needs to be available to all children, whether they live in cities, whether they live in rural areas. So that's the right, and we can affirm that in the preamble of that. When we are making choice an important issue here, we should also make sure that that right is also affirmed, that it is the right of everyone to get that education.

Also, "Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages." Certainly, that's also an important right, and I think that it should never depend on the size of the pockets of the parents what kind of education the child will get. We should make sure – it's our fundamental responsibility as government, as society – that we provide quality education regardless of parents' socioeconomic status so that everyone has the same opportunities. So, again, it's an important right that should be included and affirmed in this bill and will send a clear signal to Albertans that the government is absolutely committed to making sure that education is available at the elementary stage to everyone and that it's also free.

However, I will say that the changes the government has brought to the Education budget have made it a bit difficult for many families. If I talk about CBE in Calgary, in grades 1 to 6 kids will be paying a lot of money – their parents will be paying a lot of money – to get to school, and I suggest that getting to school is fundamentally a question of access to education. If we are affirming, taking something from the United Nations declaration of rights, we should make sure that we are taking the full provision, and if we are saying that, we should also make sure that we are putting the money where our mouth is.

The other thing is that "technical and professional education shall be . . . generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." Again, that's another fundamental right. I don't think anybody in this House will have any issue with that, that we should make sure that education, vocational training, all those opportunities are equally available to all Albertans.

The second provision is that "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality," again, another fundamental right and something that we need to affirm. When we were in government, we started reviewing the curriculum – that work was stopped by this government – and that work was started with experts in the field, and up until we were in government, almost 100,000 Albertans had participated in that process.

Certainly, that process was started with a view – and it was heading in that direction – that we will have a cutting-edge, modern curriculum that will be focused on the full development of the human personality, that will also take into account the diversity of Alberta. Its syllabus, the curriculum that was set in the 1980s, certainly needed to be revised because in four decades things have changed. Alberta's landscape has changed, diversity has changed, and our understanding of diversity has changed. All of those things

were considered in that process, and it's sad to see that the government has stopped that.

Now, the third provision is choice in education. The constituency that I represent comprises people of many different cultural backgrounds. Certainly, it's something important for them. I indicated that from my riding many parents send their kids to FFCA, to TLCs, to Almadina charter academy, to Islamic school. It's important for them to have that choice. But when we are talking about that choice, it's important that they can access that choice without any barriers. That would include transportation fees, which, because of the cuts perpetrated by this government, have doubled, tripled. The CBE schedule shows that in mandated programs you will pay \$400, in nonmandated programs parents will pay \$800, and for grades 9 to 12 they will be paying \$77 per month. That is impacting parents' ability to send their kids to school.

It's particularly concerning in my riding because I represent an area of the city of Calgary where most people are newcomers. Their incomes are significantly lower than the average Calgary household income, and the difference is quite significant. Calgary's average individual household income is somewhere around 42,000 and some dollars while in all three neighbourhoods that I represent, the individual household income is below \$30,000, so it's a \$12,000, \$13,000 difference in every single neighbourhood. For them to afford \$400, \$800, or \$77 for transportation, it's restricting their ability to provide their kids with proper education. They cannot choose any other school than their designated school. It doesn't matter how much the government talks about choice because when they choose any other school, government policies are designed in a way that they are made to pay for that transportation.

That's why I am proposing this provision, article 26 of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights. We are talking about choice, but without making sure that education is available to everyone as a right, without making sure that it's accessible to everyone, without making sure that it's acceptable to everyone, and without making sure that it reflects the diversity of our province, I think that there will be no choice in education. If the government is true to what they're saying, I think, then, that they should accept this amendment, and they should reaffirm their commitment to education, as stated in article 26 of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights, and work towards making sure that it's available and accessible to everyone, work towards making sure that it's acceptable and that it reflects the diversity of our province and prepares the students' full human personality.

10:20

As this article suggests, the parties to this declaration also agreed that they will introduce progressively free education at all levels. What we have seen in the last one year is that they have increased fees at all levels, whether we talk about the K to 12 system, whether we talk about polytechnic trades or vocational training centres, whether we talk about university education. They are going exactly in the opposite direction of what this article is asking from the government, and the best argument they could come up with is that our neighbouring provinces have more expensive education so we need to make it more expensive for Albertans.

Based on what I said, I am urging all my colleagues to include article 26 in full in this Choice in Education Act. Send a clear signal to Albertans that the government is absolutely committed to making sure that everyone's right to education is protected, that the government is committed to making sure that elementary education will be free, that the government is committed to taking transportation fees and other burdens off the parents, and commit

to working towards making education progressively free at all levels.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So happy to get up and actually speak to this proposed amendment by the Member for Calgary-McCall. Of course, I'm an individual who strongly believes in not only when it comes to education in terms of the universal declaration of human rights but all of the universal declaration of human rights.

I'll remind this House that the reason for that is because I was actually born in a country where democracy was crushed. It was crushed in a way that was so unfathomable, where people who fought for the right of every individual to be able to have access to good-quality education were either made to disappear or they were killed right in the streets because the people who were against them thought that this was a socialist idea. That everybody should have equal access to good-quality education, they said, is a socialist idea and therefore is not worthy.

I believe in human dignity. I believe that each and every individual should be respected. Put the politics aside – put the politics aside – and let us focus on who we're talking about when it comes to education. We're talking about your children. We're talking about my children. We're talking about all the children of all Albertans. When it comes to education and the future of the education of each and every individual within this province, we should be focused on making sure that each and every Albertan gets equal access and the opportunity to educate themselves. Why shouldn't we stand up and say that the principles contained within article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights, as they pertain to education – let us strive to make sure that in our policies we implement those values, those principles, those ideas. It is noble – it is noble – to do so.

I respect immensely the opinions of the members on the other side and what they are trying to do with this particular bill, that they are sincere as it pertains to article 26(3), that “parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.” I understand, and I get it, but let us not forget the other two subsections of the universal declaration of human rights when it comes to education. This is why I strongly urge every member of this House to support this amendment, because although I respect what you're trying to do, my concern is the adverse effects of what will happen when you implement what is contained within this bill.

I've gotten up to speak specifically to the bill. Now I'm speaking to the amendment, of course, but as I stated when I was speaking to the bill, the experience that I've had, the reality of what is contained within this bill that has been implemented in other jurisdictions has actually led to the adverse effect of people being marginalized out of a good-quality education. That is my true concern here, members. Now, if you can demonstrate for me that by implementing what is contained in this bill, those adverse effects will not happen, then I could stand in this House and vote with you, but I'm not seeing that. Everywhere that I see these concepts and these principles contained within this bill and how they're applied in other jurisdictions, we see the marginalization of specific peoples.

Now, I stand before you as a Muslim Latino. All over the United States of America blacks and Latinos are marginalized out of the education system because they're implementing the exact same values and principles contained within this here bill. You're asking

me to sign off on what I know will be an immensely adverse effect on people of diverse ethnic origin. If that's not the case, then demonstrate it for me, members. Everywhere that I see these concepts implemented, I see the marginalization of specific groups of people.

Here in our own province we face similar challenges with the fact that indigenous children and people from rural areas have less access to education. I am not convinced that this is actually going to help those populations. Now, I understand that you want to give more choice, but my fear is that what's going to happen is that this is the slippery slope that's going to lead us towards this American-style, privatized education here in the province of Alberta. I'm concerned about that.

Now, this could easily be fixed by letting every Albertan know that we subscribe to the entire article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights as it applies to education. As has been so eloquently stated by the Member for Calgary-McCall, we should be focused on providing free education for all. I'll just read subsection (1) of article 26.

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

In Chile right now, where my family is originally from, where I'm originally from, where I was born, the education system has been privatized in the same way that it has in the United States. People that come from marginalized areas, rural areas, indigenous people in Chile do not have access to good-quality education. It's very difficult for them to get access to good-quality education even at elementary, in the fundamental stage.

10:30

So my question to you, members of the governing party, is: how are you going to make sure that that does not happen here in the province of Alberta? The challenge already exists that indigenous and rural people do not have the same access as people in the cosmopolitan centres. My fear is that you're going to make a bad problem or a difficult challenge even worse. We need to send a clear signal to all Albertans that every child in this province has the right to a good-quality education and not just those who can afford it, whose parents can afford it.

It's possible for us to create the same choice that you're speaking of within the public system. There's a perfect example, actually, at Grace Martin school. It's called the sakinah circle. It's specifically focused on Islamic education. I know so many families who send their children to Grace Martin school in Mill Woods, and it's a wonderful program – a wonderful program – where the children learn the Alberta curriculum as they would in any other school, but then, on top of that, the children learn how to read and write Arabic. They also learn from the Quran. They get to learn about their religion and the values and the principles upon which their noble, sacred scripture is based, and the parents can continue to educate their children as they see so fit. This all happens within the public system at Grace Martin school within the sakinah circle program.

A lot of those children that go to that school come from economically challenged families. Now, my concern is that we're going to follow and we're going to fall into the trap that other jurisdictions have done by introducing these kinds of principles and values into their education system, and then those same families, where the parents have to work, you know, two, maybe even three jobs, are not going to be able to send their kids to get that same Islamic education that they are already getting through Grace Martin school. This is my concern.

Subsection (2) of article 26 goes on to say:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

I can think of no better example than that within the sakinah circle at Grace Martin school within the public school system right here in the city of Edmonton. I cherish the opportunities that I have to actually go and visit the program and talk to the children. I do. Every time I have the opportunity to visit Grace Martin school and read to the children, I always make sure to mention article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights and how important it is.

Being a Muslim, sharing with young Muslims, talking about how for us to be a good Muslim is to be a good human being, to strive to be of noble character, to promote peace, to promote love and understanding amongst all people, which is exactly what article 26 is all about in the universal declaration of human rights – by voting for this amendment, we would be declaring to each and every Albertan that we believe in all aspects of article 26 and that we're going to attempt to incorporate it into every aspect of education within the province of Alberta. To not vote for it would say: no; that's not important. I would hope that for every member in this House it would be important to say, "Yes; we do support subsection (1) and subsection (2) of article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights," but unfortunately what we're seeing from this government is actually the reverse.

I want to take this opportunity to read for you a post by a mother. Her name is Amanda Keen. She posted this on Facebook on June 10 at 7:19 p.m. It reads like this:

I cried today. I cried hard today. I cried hard today for my child. I cried after being told my child would not receive the support she needs in her class next year. I cried as I heard [that] her SLP was being cut from a 1.5 to a 0.5 FTE position. I cried as I was told she may not receive any speech time next year. I cried knowing my daughter only meets the PUF criteria by 3 months now as the age has been cut from 6 to 4.8 years old. I cried for the parents who have children with more severe needs than my own. I cried for the teachers who are tired and uncertain and can no longer hide the worried looks from their faces. I cried knowing Alberta voted for this. I cried the hardest as I looked at my daughter innocently playing in the yard knowing she deserves better. So while I try not to share my political beliefs, next time you vote Alberta, do better. Sincerely, one heartbroken and angry mama.

Now, of course, Amanda Keen is but one. This is the reality that parents are going through here in the province of Alberta when it comes to this education system. I'm begging you to listen. I'm begging you to listen to the voices of mothers like Amanda Keen. By voting for this amendment, you would be supporting the reverse of what's being actually described by Amanda Keen in her post dated June 10. We would strive to make education free in the province of Alberta. And why not? Why not, members? Why not? I know that you agree with me that you have a deep respect for Albertans. So then let's treat them with dignity. I can't tell you the number of constituents that I speak to that have come here from other countries, and one of the main reasons why they come here and they want to live in the province of Alberta and they want to live here in this great country called Canada is because they know that their children are going to get better access to education.

10:40

But what are we doing? We're actually making the education system worse, as has been described by Amanda Keen in her post from June 10. We have a responsibility, and that responsibility is to

Albertans. Even more importantly, it's to those Albertans that are coming in the future. They need access to education because education is going to give them the opportunities that they need to be able to realize themselves as human beings, to be able to succeed in this world, not just economically but socially and spiritually as well.

So I'm asking you, please, members of this House ...

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Moving back to Bill 15 proper, I see the hon. Minister of Justice has risen to join debate.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Chair, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Minister of Justice has risen.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Chair, I move to rise and report progress on bills 7 and 15.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 7 and Bill 15. 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 Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

Government Motions

(continued)

Committee Referral for Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act

22. Mr. Schweitzer moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon: Be it resolved that

1. The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and the committee shall be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review pursuant to section 37 of that act;
2. The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
3. In accordance with section 37 of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within one year after beginning its review, and that report is to include any amendments recommended by the committee.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any hon. members looking to join debate on this motion?

Do I see perhaps the hon. Minister of Justice to close debate on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Government Motion 22 carried]

Mr. Schweitzer: I rise to ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 39(1)(b) in order to proceed immediately to Government Motion 23, notice of which was given earlier today.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

For the benefit of the House, 39(1) states:

One day's notice shall be given . . .

(b) for the appointment of any committee.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has asked for unanimous consent to waive this standing order.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee

23. Mr. Schweitzer moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that

1. A Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to review the Public Health Act, consisting of the following members: Mr. Milliken, chair; Ms Rosin, deputy chair; Ms Ganley; Ms Gray; Ms Hoffman; Mr. Long; Ms Lovely; Mr. Neudorf; Mr. Shepherd; Mr. Turton; Mr. Reid; and Mr. Rowswell;
2. The committee may limit its review to sections of the Public Health Act that the committee selects for consideration;
3. The committee continues despite a prorogation of a session and may without leave of the Assembly meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
4. Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies,

rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair;

5. In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may utilize the services of employees of the Legislative Assembly Office or, with the concurrence of the head of a department or an officer of the Legislature, utilize the services of employees of the public service employed in that department or office;
6. The committee must submit its report to the Assembly, including any amendments to the act recommended by the committee, within four months after commencing its review;
7. If the Assembly is not sitting at the time the report of the committee is completed, the chair of the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk in accordance with Standing Order 38.1 and forwarding a copy to each Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Schweitzer: There you go. This one is a little bit longer. This committee will conduct an important review of the Public Health Act.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Under Standing Order 18(1)(h) this is debatable. Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate at this time?

[Government Motion 23 carried]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Justice and Deputy Government House Leader has risen again.

Mr. Schweitzer: Yes. It's like both sides of the aisle have worked things out, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 16.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:50 p.m.]

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