



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, June 23, 2020

Day 36

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 23, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the Chamber this afternoon are guests of my office. Please rise as I call your name: the Member of Parliament for South Surrey-White Rock, the Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay; and Brent, Donna, and Lindsay Chapman. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

Opioid Overdoses

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On June 9 the associate minister of health said that opioid deaths were falling. Days later his own department's data shows that he's wrong. Opioid overdose deaths started spiking even before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. They're up more than 14 per cent over the previous quarter. Eleven Albertans will overdose and die this week, 11 more next week, and 11 more the week after. Each one will leave behind a devastated and grieving family. Some of those Albertans' lives could have been saved. They should have been able to pick up the phone and call a support worker, who would monitor their condition and call an ambulance if they overdosed. Those Albertans might have survived to go into treatment, but they won't be able to make that call because the associate minister, someone with no medical training, reached into Alberta Health Services and personally cancelled the program.

We know this minister has a personal prejudice against supervised consumption services and has always pretended that this is driven by community concerns. But when Alberta Health Services developed an innovative program that had zero community impact, he still cancelled it. He claimed it was for safety reasons. But for whose safety? Certainly not the Albertans who are overdosing in their homes with no help on the way, certainly not the health professionals who developed this program, and certainly not the community that will lose a neighbour, a friend, and a family member.

The minister tried to change the channel by announcing the expansion of another program, but later in the day his own office admitted that it wasn't an expansion at all, just a reannouncement of an existing government program. It's a shameful attempt to distract from his refusal to save Albertans' lives. I hope that one day we can help this government see that Albertans who use substances are human beings whose lives are worth saving. This minister can take an important step towards that today by getting out of the way and restoring Alberta's virtual supervised consumption program.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-North has a statement to make.

Calgary Storm

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about last week's terrible hailstorm that affected those in Calgary and surrounding areas. My thoughts are with all those who suffered massive property damage from the storm. The storm came in quickly and unexpectedly. Many Calgarians found significant damage to their homes, cars, and property in the aftermath of the storm. In the days following the storm, many of my colleagues here at the Legislature, including the Premier, and I were out in our communities talking with our constituents and seeing the damage first-hand.

Calgarians were already facing difficult circumstances due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the recession, and the crash in oil prices. It really has been one thing after another, Mr. Speaker. Now to be hit with the financial cost of fixing property damage is heartbreaking, to say the least. I know many of my colleagues are working hard to help our constituents through this very difficult time. A strong community spirit will help us get through anything that comes our way. Calgary has that spirit; it always has.

Mr. Speaker, I am really concerned for the people who have been affected by this. My heart goes out to everyone impacted by the storm. I will do whatever I can to help Albertans navigate any red tape. I know many people may be wondering how to proceed. I would like to remind Calgarians to please reach out to their MLAs, myself included, to your insurer, or to the Insurance Bureau of Canada if you need help navigating through the claims process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Calgary Stampede

Mr. Gotfried: The first week of July usually sees tens of thousands of visitors from around the world flocking to Calgary in anticipation of our world-famous fun and hospitality. Cowboy hats, boots, and buckles are worn by just about everyone, and the grandstands are packed to the brim with fans ready to catch the courageous and heart-stopping action of our professional cowboys and cowgirls. And, Mr. Speaker, that's no bull.

The Calgary Stampede is the greatest outdoor show on Earth, and it's no wonder we have a time-worn global reputation topped by our iconic white Smithbilt hat. Between city-wide pancake offerings, midway games, hair-raising rides, heritage exhibitions, and our predisposition for just about everything deep fried, a good time is had by all.

I, as most Albertans, was devastated by the announcement that the 2020 Calgary Stampede was cancelled due to COVID-19. We survived hell and high water, but this decision was one of the toughest in the Stampede's long history and focused on ensuring the health and safety of Albertans and our cherished global visitors alike. What about our beloved parade, of which I have missed only one in my entire life? But today let's talk about fillies, not filibusters.

Before we hang up our cowboy hats for another year, let's be clear that the tenacity of Albertans will always shine through and that you might be able to cancel the Stampede, but you can't take away the Stampede spirit. Families will be hosting their own pancake breakfasts and barbecues across the province. Country music will be blasting from speakers as old friends and family gather, distancing, of course, right in our backyards, celebrating our heritage, our roots, and what makes Calgary and Alberta such a

special place and the best place in the world to raise a family and build a life of hope, optimism, and ambition.

Fellow cowpokes, the spirit of Stampede will live on as we tip our hats to the leaders, staff, and thousands of volunteers that make it happen every year, every decade, year after year, decade after decade. Mr. Speaker, as our friends at the Calgary Stampede have reminded us, next year we will indeed be back in the saddle again.

The Speaker: I am not sure if it's a yee-haw or a yahoo that's in order here. [interjections] My apologies.

COVID-19 Outbreaks at Meat-processing Facilities

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, the onslaught of COVID-19 has exposed serious risk management flaws in Alberta's meat-packing and -processing industry. Albertans are rightfully asking questions and demanding answers about the future of meat in the province. Last week the Minister of Health admitted that he failed to properly manage the COVID-19 outbreaks at Alberta packing plants. The NDP opposition has called for a full investigation into why over 1,500 workers got infected and three people died as a result. How many of these infections and maybe even the deaths might have been prevented had the UCP government respectfully engaged with the UFCW right from the onset?

Albertans want answers to many other questions surrounding meat production and sale in the province. Concentration of processing capacity in two very large processing plants is a risk to our supply chain. Is there a better balance to be found by promoting medium and smaller packing houses in the province? Would that not leave more money in the pockets of Alberta producers? What about local food security? Why not explore ways to remove impediments to farm gate sales? Could we not have Alberta meat inspectors adapt to serve small on-farm producers so they could sell directly into the Alberta meat market? COVID-19 has gotten Albertans talking about Alberta meat production, local food security, and sustainable incomes for our primary producers.

I call upon the UCP government to hold a major public inquiry into meat packing and processing to get the answers Albertans deserve. The long-term viability of this hugely important industry is at stake.

Tourism Industry

Mr. Loewen: We have been dealing with the COVID pandemic for three months now. It has been a tumultuous time for Albertans both in their personal lives and economically. What we do know is that the economic effects are not over. Having been involved in the tourism industry for the last 27 years, this spring is the first spring in those 27 years that my family's company has not had clients. Of course, we're not the only ones. Many other tour operators and companies that rely on tourists have been devastated. With the border shutdown and self-isolation rules, there have been no tourists able to come into Alberta from outside of Canada, which is a huge part of our tourism economy. Our national parks have been deserted, our rural areas have empty hotels, our tour guides are unemployed, and our stores are shuttered. Many of these businesses have had zero income this year.

Tourism adds about \$10 billion into the Alberta economy and employs about 80,000 people. It is important not just for the national parks but so that all parts of the province have something to see and enjoy for people from all over the world. We have local arts and entertainment people and those coming from around the world that are shut down, and that also hurts our tourism opportunities.

1:40

We campaigned on doubling tourism income in Alberta by 2030. That could be upwards of \$20 billion. Tourists that come in from outside Alberta bring new money into our economy. We need to work with our federal leaders to ensure a safe and prudent return to having out-of-country visitors return to our beautiful province. Very few tourists are able to visit our great province for 14 days. Most tourists visit for three to seven days. Therefore, our province needs to work with our health professionals to ensure that visitors that enter are healthy and won't be arbitrarily subjected to a 14-day quarantine or self-isolation. With our testing abilities, we should be able to ascertain the health of individuals as they enter, limiting the amount of time in isolation. If nothing changes, many tourism businesses will have zero income for the entire year.

Albertans are eager to have their lives return as close to normal as possible while still protecting our most vulnerable. We know that in consultation with our health professionals we can continue that return to normalcy in a safe and efficient way.

Site Rehabilitation Program

Mr. Schmidt: Clean up after yourself: every child and parent knows the command. We all learn that we are responsible for our own actions. It's part of life. The federal government gave the provincial government a billion dollars to address well liabilities and get Albertans back to work. This is a sensible idea, but both governments have failed to put proper guardrails around the program to ensure that the funds are used in the best way possible.

For decades the oil and gas industry did very well in this province, helping make Alberta one of the best places in the world to live. They did so on the understanding that they would pay the cleanup costs when they finished pumping public resources from the ground. Now, with the end coming soon for many conventional oil and gas wells, we should protect this agreement as much as we can. Thousands of landowners have already been cheated out of their surface lease payments. Local governments are owed millions of dollars in taxes from oil and gas companies that might never get paid. It's not right.

I've heard from many Albertans and landowners that the taxpayer-sponsored industry cleanup needs to have some strict guardrails in place to make sure the money does what it's supposed to do. First, landowners should be paid their surface rights and municipalities their unpaid taxes. Second, companies benefiting from the program should be selected on need or where Albertans see the most benefit. That means that oil and gas companies that benefit from the program should also contribute to the program as much as they can so that it's not just a handout. Third, cleanup of sites must be selected based on environmental need. After all, money spent on environmental cleanup should actually clean up the environment.

These three proposals help improve the program. If we help clean up the messes left by others, they should at the very least make sure that the money goes to where it belongs. Every kid and parent would agree.

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

Canadian Energy Industry

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2015 there has been a giant sucking sound coming from Alberta. It is the sound of investment being sucked away from our energy sector and then being reinvested in other oil and gas producing nations like Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela. This means Calgary, Canada, and the

world are moving backwards, not only because more investment here helps pay for things like roads, schools, hospitals, and social programs, but if investors aren't investing here, then those same dollars go to jurisdictions that do nothing to fight climate change, nothing to support human rights, and of course these are corrupt countries with dictators and people who are truly suffering.

So why would an investor choose dictators over us? Many global investors are using environmental, social, and governance, or ESG, standards to guide their investment decisions. Because of years of misinformation about our oil sands supported by the NDP, these investors can't see the truth. Alberta and Canada are global leaders in ESG standards. Environmentally we've done amazing work and lowered our GHG emissions, we reinvest profits into clean technologies, and then we send those technologies around the world, which is real climate action. Also, did you know that in 2006 Alberta became the first jurisdiction in North America to institute a carbon price?

Mr. Speaker, through you to the world, if you prevent one barrel of oil from being produced here, that barrel of oil will still get produced. However, instead of coming from our ethical production, that same barrel will come floating down the St. Lawrence River in a rusty old oil tanker shipped in likely by some other country with lower ESG standards. So Russia gets all the profits; we get all the losses.

Quickly, to sum it all up, for the sake of global climate change, for the sake of our fight against corruption, the world needs more Alberta and Canada energy.

The Speaker: It seems to me the whole world could hear you this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East has the call.

COVID-19 Impact and Economic Relaunch

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last couple of months have presented a tremendous challenge for our province. Albertans had already faced years of economic downturn, low oil prices, and a previous government with a broken system that was driving away thousands of jobs and a huge amount of investments. We have managed to get the economy started and running while at the same time repealed the provincial carbon tax, invested in capital projects, education, and health care as well as reducing red tape.

When Alberta was hit with the triple threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic shutdown, and a total collapse of oil prices, our government was ready. This was one of the greatest obstacles that we have faced since the Great Depression in the 1930s, but the Albertan spirit of strength and resilience helped us get through this while having one of the lowest infection rates in the nation in a far less economically destructive lockdown than many other jurisdictions in North America.

As the pandemic begins to recede, we must begin to think about the future. Whether you are a retiree whose investment portfolio has gone down the drain, a small-business owner who isn't sure about whether they will still be open in a month, or a student who no longer has a job lined up for summer, our government will support you. We recognize the pain and suffering that many Albertans are facing at this time, and I want to assure Calgary's constituents that we will work tirelessly to fight for jobs, reinvigorate the economy, and get our province back on track through our relaunch plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tenille Townes and Big Hearts for Big Kids

Mrs. Allard: Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to rise in the House today to talk about an inspiring Albertan, natural leader, and my personal

friend from the great constituency of Grande Prairie: Tenille Townes. Let me tell you about Tenille's big heart. When she was just 15 years old, she heard about a group of young people from her school that didn't have a safe home and family like she did, and she decided to do something about it.

Over 10 years ago she started Big Hearts for Big Kids, an interactive evening of singer-songwriter performances, designed to raise money for the Sunrise House, the northernmost youth emergency shelter in the province of Alberta. On the night of the very first Big Hearts for Big Kids the shelter had actually just shut down due to lack of funds, and the fundraiser that night paved the way for it to continue. Today Big Hearts for Big Kids is an annual tradition in Grande Prairie and has raised over \$1.95 million in support of the work of Sunrise House. Since the first event the shelter has served over 12,000 bed nights for young people aged 12 to 17, providing a safe place for those youth to get back on their feet.

Due to COVID-19 this year's event will be a little different as it will be a virtual event broadcast from the famous Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. This landmark is the original home of the Grand Ole Opry and is known to locals as the mother church of country music. The event is being held on June 30 and will include music from Towne's new album, *The Lemonade Stand*. I encourage all Albertans to tune in on YouTube, Facebook, or Instagram and click to donate to this worthy cause. Donations can be made at www.bigheartsforbigkids.com.

Mr. Speaker, this event, all it represents and the innovative delivery in the time of COVID, truly exemplifies the power of Alberta's civil society. I want to thank Tenille Townes for being an inspiring example of generosity and a tremendous ambassador for the city of Grande Prairie and the great province of Alberta. I encourage everyone to check out Big Hearts for Big Kids this June 30.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 28, the Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020, sponsored by my colleague the hon. the Minister of Service Alberta, as well as oral notice for Bill 29, Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2020, sponsored by my colleague the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Paid Sick Leave during COVID-19 Pandemic

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With restrictions being lifted, more Albertans have been going back to work, and cases are going up. While not unexpected, this is concerning. If we're going to properly prevent a second wave of COVID-19 devastating the economy, workers must feel confident and financially able to self-isolate when they are sick and required to quarantine. We need paid sick leave, and we need it now. Will the Premier present a plan to ensure that all working Albertans have access to paid sick leave at least during the remainder of this pandemic?

Mr. Kenney: I thank the hon. member for the question, Mr. Speaker. As she knows, Alberta has taken more action to protect people from the financial impact of this global downturn and the pandemic with some \$14 billion of protection for workers, families, and job creators. We await further information from the government of Canada on their intentions with respect to paid work leave. They have expressed an intention in principle to fund provincial efforts in this respect, and I'll be speaking to the Prime Minister about this tomorrow afternoon.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As all Albertans know, following the direction of the chief medical officer of health to stay home when sick is critically important. In Edmonton this weekend alone five restaurants were forced to close because they had staff who either tested positive or were directly exposed. These workers came off the CERB benefit, went back onto their hourly wages, only to go right back to mandatory self-isolation for 14 days. This financial stress is going to force people to hide their symptoms in order to pay the rent. Will the Premier bring in paid sick leave? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Well, first of all, I'll remind the hon. member that this government acted immediately at the outset of the pandemic with changes to the labour code to protect workers who had to stay home because of the illness. We also introduced the emergency isolation payments, which totalled over \$110 million. We were, I think, one of only three provinces to offer that support so that people who felt sick could stay home. Thirdly, we are working with the government of Canada on a potential package for paid sick leave, and I look forward, again, to finalization of those negotiations hopefully as early as this week.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 27 the Premier said that his labour minister was working on it, yet what we've actually had happen over the last month is just a repetition of the same talking points: they're waiting for details, they're working with Ottawa, and they think that people should stay home if they're sick. That's the problem. People can't afford to, and the supports that this government granted at the start of the pandemic aren't there for people now. Will you support paid sick leave? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, we have had constructive conversations with the national government that has been offering compensation to provinces. We, like every single province, all 10 of them, are waiting for the finalization of those details, and that's very important, just as the amendments were that we made to the labour code early in the pandemic, the emergency isolation payments, and the \$14 billion of support that we've given to Albertans and job creators throughout this crisis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for the second set of questions.

Canada Pension Plan

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nearly 15 years ago a group of Albertans were tasked with looking at an Alberta pension plan at the request of Premier Klein. That committee noted the big problem of Alberta assuming its share of unfunded liabilities from the Canada pension plan. It was \$60 billion back then. Fast-forward and this Premier's Fair Deal Panel neglected to tell Albertans that the

Finance ministry's expert analysis already showed that the unfunded liabilities now amount to a staggering \$133.1 billion. To the Premier: why won't you acknowledge that there is a massive financial risk to Albertans if you pull us out of the Canada pension plan?

Mr. Kenney: Regrettably, the NDP is once more emphasizing their economic illiteracy. I would point them to the comments made by one of the most prominent economists in Alberta, Professor Tombe, who yesterday said:

I'll be . . . blunt here: there's no such thing as a \$133 billion unfunded liability the way some

the NDP

are currently claiming. It's just silly. An [Alberta pension plan] is a debatable proposition.

We agree. There are

points in favour. Points against. Let's debate those points sensibly.

That's exactly what this government intends to do and ultimately to allow Albertans and not the NDP to have the final say.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that this Premier would be an expert in how Alberta budgeting works. Here in Alberta we have consolidated budgets. If we pull out of the CPP, a \$133.1 billion liability will sit on our province's balance sheet while the Premier creates his pension plan, a plan where he will decide the contribution rates, he will dictate where the money is invested, and he will determine the value of the pension payouts. Albertans do not want this Premier's hands anywhere near their CPP, and the polling shows it. To the Premier: why are you dead set on an agenda that assumes this liability while the vast majority of Albertans are opposed?

Mr. Kenney: We can see what is taking shape here, Mr. Speaker. It's another effort by the NDP to mislead Albertans with profoundly deceptive, fake facts. As Professor Tombe points out, that notional liability would only exist if no one pays a dime in premiums in the future. But here's the deal. What they think is this: Quebecers are smart enough to manage their own pension, Mr. Trudeau is smart enough to manage it on Bay Street, but we Albertans aren't smart enough to manage our own pensions right here in Edmonton. I think Albertans fundamentally disagree. We have a lot more confidence in the financial capacity of Alberta.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier is so confident of his facts, why does he refuse to share them with Albertans? Huge unfunded liabilities moved to our provincial books, no guarantees for Albertans on their retirement security, leaving investment decisions up to the whims of the Premier: Albertans can smell a bad deal a mile away. To the Premier: why are you not sharing details with Albertans, why did you not provide this information through the fair deal process, and why wouldn't you tell people about the Finance department being convinced that we can't even do this without the approval of other provinces?

Mr. Kenney: First of all, Mr. Speaker, we trust Albertans so much that we are going to provide them with an exhaustive study on the cost benefits and structure of a potential pension plan and entrust them with the final decision. Secondly, none of these investments would be made at the whim of this or any other Premier but independently, much like is done by the Caisse de dépôt of Quebec and by the CPP Investment Board. Thirdly, the notion that this is going to cost Albertans is absurd. We have the youngest population in the country. If Albertans decide to go in this direction, it will mean either higher pension benefits or lower taxes or both.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Meadows is rising.

Provincial Court Nominating Committee Appointment

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta, Canada, and the entire world are beginning to address issues of racism and oppression head-on, yet what we saw in this House yesterday was outrageous. After three opportunities to condemn comments made by their own appointee, someone who promotes anti-Semitic conspiracies, who referred to Black Lives Matter as having an evil agenda, the Premier refused. Today he has another chance. Premier, will you condemn the anti-Semitic racist comments made by the UCP supporter you selected to oversee the appointment of Alberta judges?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I did not refuse to do so. That member sat in this place last Thursday afternoon, when I spoke for over half an hour condemning racism, specifically the pernicious nature of antiblack racism. [interjections] Why are they heckling this? I also specifically condemned the long, unjust history of anti-indigenous racism. I'm pleased to say that I have a lifetime track record of fighting anti-Semitism, a uniquely pernicious and durable form of hatred. The posts made by that individual were deeply offensive. He resigned from that board, and his resignation was accepted. End of story.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, systemic racism exists in our law enforcement and in our justice system, yet this man said that there was no need to promote more women or minorities to the bench, and he then spouted anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and made false comments about Black Lives Matter. Once they became public, the Justice minister characterized these views as, quote, diverse and suggested that they actually make Alberta stronger. Are you kidding me? Premier, will you clarify that these views do not make Alberta stronger, and will you direct your Attorney General to apologize?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, pro tip to members of the opposition. They should be prepared to respond to the actual answers, not just read canned questions. Apparently the member opposite cannot take yes for an answer. This individual made offensive posts online following his appointment. He resigned. His resignation was accepted. End of story.

Let's work together in voting for Motion 24 as representatives of the people of Alberta and jointly condemn the evil of racism and anti-Semitism.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fighting racism means calling it out, facing our own mistakes, and promoting promising to do better. Premier, there were seven qualified women and members of racialized minorities who were shown the door from this committee before their terms were up to create space for Leighton Grey. Premier, will you admit you made a mistake and reappoint one of these qualified people or at the very least let your minister have an open competition rather than appointing another friend or insider?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: I think the member opposite is asking us to reappoint the NDP donors and fundraisers to the committee. Their concept of an open competition was that whoever contributed more to the NDP got nominated. Then they attacked an indigenous lawyer for his appointment. That person made offensive comments. He's no longer on the board.

These are all highly capable, respected people, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why they're complaining. Five of our first judicial appointments to the Provincial Court of Alberta were highly qualified Alberta female lawyers. We're proud of them and the good job that they're going to do on the court.

Calgary Storm, COVID-19, and Insurance

Ms Phillips: Yesterday, when my Calgary colleague asked about relief for the devastation caused by a hailstorm in the northeast, the Premier said that he wasn't going to cover the losses of Toronto insurance companies, but that doesn't add up. The Premier actually loves padding the balance sheets of big insurance. He allowed car insurance companies to raise people's rates by more than 5 per cent, meaning some families are paying \$600 more a year. He hasn't helped people's pocketbooks. To the Premier. We are told insurance companies are now fleecing people in northeast Calgary. Can he put in a word on their behalf? Don't the insurance companies owe him one?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I think there may have been an implication of impropriety in that question.

Secondly, we have said that the insurance companies have a legal and moral obligation to fully respect their policies with premium holders. The damage done in northeast Calgary was terrible. I saw it first-hand. I've met on multiple occasions with government MLAs from northeast Calgary. I've spoken to the mayor and councillors. We're working closely with the municipality, and unlike the NDP, we don't think that taxpayers should be forced to bail out the insurance companies, who have an obligation to make good on those policies.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the Premier cozies up to the insurance industry when it serves him and then shies away from them when it comes to people in northeast Calgary or families' pocketbooks during a pandemic. Now, we found that the Insurance Bureau of Canada has a 97 per cent car insurance market share in Alberta. The IBC's hotshot lobbyist is the Premier's good friend and campaign runner, Nick Koolsbergen. The government's own documents show that IBC members generated \$671 million in car insurance profits last year. Will the Premier call his good friend and big man on the insurance front and ask him to cut the residents of northeast Calgary a break? How about drivers during the pandemic?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again – and I've said it in this place and outside of it several times – we fully expect and insist that the insurance companies make good on their policies with northeast Calgary residents affected by the hailstorms, but what we will not do, unlike the NDP, is take hundreds of millions of dollars from hard-working taxpayers and write cheques that effectively let the insurance companies off the hook. That's called a moral hazard for a reason. We, unlike the NDP, will not bail out big insurance.

Ms Phillips: When my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday called on the UCP to reinstate a cap on people's car insurance, the Premier actually got up and gloated that he saved 200 bucks on his insurance. Families didn't get that during the pandemic, but he did. Why did the Premier brag about his car insurance break but the residents of northeast Calgary whose parked cars were battered by a record hailstorm don't get anything, even when we know those companies made nearly \$700 million in profits last year alone?

Mr. Kenney: Well, you know, the member is using the privilege of this place now to basically accuse Canadian companies of criminal acts. She's saying that they are not paying out on any premiums on

cars in Calgary. Mr. Speaker, would she care to repeat that outside the House? Would she like to name specific companies? Would she like to open herself up for defamation with the kind of defamatory comments that she is making? My point was simply this, that during the pandemic insurance companies, I understand, did voluntarily offer a break on premiums to people who had reduced their driving. [interjection] She's angry about this. She keeps heckling. Once again, Team Angry: they've got it wrong.

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

Canada Pension Plan (continued)

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the angry NDP were screaming at the top of their lungs. They claimed that a prospective Alberta pension plan would create a \$133 billion unfunded liability for Alberta taxpayers. Unfortunately for the NDP, they were wrong, simply and absolutely incorrect. Given that U of C economist Trevor Tombe set the record straight, saying, "It isn't an 'unfunded liability' in any sense that matters," to the Minister of Finance: can you explain to the House what Dr. Tombe might mean by this and why the NDP were so very wrong?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must confess that I was pleased with the NDP's specious line of questioning yesterday because once again it highlighted their complete economic illiteracy. They took a number that would be based on Albertans never paying another dime in premiums forever and called that an unfunded liability, which would exist today in Alberta's portion of the Canada pension plan as managed by Justin Trudeau's friends on Bay Street. Now, that is so grossly misleading that one of the top economists in the province has called them out and said that their allegations are silly and unfounded.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP were further embarrassed by the *Edmonton Journal* headline this morning about the NDP claim, saying, quote, economist says the numbers should not be taken seriously, and given that this NDP claim would require an absurd situation where no one in the province makes a pension payment for a period of 150 years, to the minister: for the benefit of the opposition, can you explain why a prospective Alberta pension plan would not expose Albertans to any additional liability?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, really, what we heard from the NDP on this yesterday was just the first instalment in a long-term campaign to deceive Albertans about their pensions. You know, this is the crew that uses the politics of fear and smear – they always have – but there's very little lower than to scare people about their pension savings. Now, I know that the NDP supports Justin Trudeau's increase in the pension tax, and the NDP thinks that Bay Street knows better how to invest our money than Alberta does, but Albertans will decide in a referendum.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To reiterate earlier comments, Dr. Tombe also said:

I'll be pretty blunt here: there's no such thing as a \$133 billion unfunded liability the way some are currently claiming. It's just silly. An APP is a debatable proposition. Points in favour. Points against. Let's debate those points sensibly.

Rather than listening to misleading partisan attacks, can the Minister of Finance tell this House about the rigorous work that will be done to explore the Fair Deal Panel's recommendation on an Alberta pension plan?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As has been noted, my department will do a deep dive and undertake a thorough analysis to ensure that Albertans understand clearly the opportunities and the risks of moving to an Alberta pension plan. Should a recommendation be made to proceed, the Premier has been clear that we will take this to Albertans in the form of a referendum. I take very seriously the health of the funds Albertans are counting upon for their retirement. We'll do our homework on this policy proposal, and I would encourage members opposite to do the same rather than rushing to announce half-baked conspiracy . . .

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

Medical Diagnostic Imaging Wait Times

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, through the second half of 2019 wait times for diagnostic imaging soared because the Health minister failed to renew the funding that our government put in place for CT scans and MRIs. Even before the pandemic Albertans were facing wait times of more than a year to find out if they had a brain tumour. In February the minister said that he'd asked AHS to come up with a plan. Now it's June. The economy is reopening. Surgeries are being scheduled. Where is the minister's plan to fix the wait times that are spiking so dangerously on his watch?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The action plan that we implemented in 2019 for diagnostic imaging is still going to be proceeding, as is the Alberta surgical initiative. Now that we are relaunching and going into relaunch, we're at about 70 per cent of our surgical capacity right now. We're going to be at 100 per cent over the summer and be able to address the wait times as well. The 70,000 Albertans that were on a waiting list when the NDP left government: we're going to deal with those folks who are on a waiting list as well as those who had to have their surgeries postponed during COVID.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that however many people were on the list when that minister stepped in, it grew massively after and given that on June 11 the minister wrote to Dr. Alayne Farries,

I too am deeply concerned with high wait times for these exams . . .

I have requested issues related to long wait times for MRI/CT exams be addressed as a priority,

and given that the minister has sat on his hands for months, promised plans that apparently still don't exist, does the minister's deep concern include understanding that he is actually putting Albertans' lives at risk if he fails to act?

2:10

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, sitting on my hands for four months dealing with the global pandemic, where we worked with our front-line workers to be able to get 2,250 beds dedicated to COVID to deal with the surge that we were expecting in an elevated case,

which was the responsible thing to do. We also found I think it was 325 ICU beds with ventilators as well as an additional – I can't remember how many it was – ICU beds without a ventilator. We were going to be taking care of Albertans in an elevated situation. We were prepared, Mr. Speaker, by working with our front line.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister found time to fight with doctors and impose a new physician funding framework and charge ahead with his plans to privatize lab services and given that this minister has admitted that Alberta has the equipment and the personnel to process more scans but given that this minister still cut \$46 million out of diagnostics in the most recent Health budget and given that the minister is happy to divert tax dollars for pandemic relief to pay salaries of his political party staff, will this minister commit to at least restoring all of the money they cut from diagnostics in their Budget 2020 in order to reduce his dangerous wait times?

Mr. Shandro: Totally incorrect, Mr. Speaker. Listen, we are dealing with the wait times for MRI and CT scans, wait times that went up every year that the NDP was in government. They ignored the problem until their last year. We're dealing with it systemically by dealing with those wait times as well as our Alberta surgical initiative, which is going to be on steroids. Our surgical capacity is going to be getting up to a hundred per cent. We are dealing with these wait times. We're making patients the centre of the system, as opposed to the NDP, which did not have patients' best interests and have them at the centre of the system.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the one hand, Albertans have watched job losses from the government's drastic budget cuts rack up. On the other, [the minister] has announced that the government will pay the management consulting firm McKinsey & Company almost four million dollars to deliver a plan for system "renewal" . . . for a "future economy."

These are the words of Carolyn Sale, associate professor at the University of Alberta. To the minister: 2030? You are not even doing anything to help students and staff right now. You can't plan for the future while you are hamstringing the present unless your plan for the future is a hollowed out shell where a college used to be.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are doing plenty to help ensure that we set our students up for success. We're investing in organizations like Careers: the Next Generation and Women Building Futures to help ensure that students have additional opportunities when it comes to postsecondary education. As well, we've created new scholarships, and we're introducing a new performance-based funding model to ensure that our students have the skills that they need to function in a modern economy. On top of that, we are still focused on the future. We are still building a plan for Alberta 2030 to make sure that we develop a proactive plan to achieve results.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that, as Professor Sale points out, this government chose to give away a \$4.7 billion tax break to big corporations who took businesses and created jobs outside of

Alberta and given that this government has not supported students in finding jobs through programs like STEP, can the minister explain how he plans on creating job-ready students while his government focuses on paying off wealthy friends and driving away job creators from our province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'd be very happy to address how we're going to help ensure that we set our students up for success. One of the things that we'll be doing as part of our new performance-based funding model will be relying heavily on work-integrated learning and working with our institutions to ensure that they are expanding work-integrated learning opportunities for our students. We know – the evidence is quite detailed – that when students have the opportunity to participate in work-integrated learning opportunities, they have faster transitions to the workplace, and they generally have higher income. That's just one example. There's much more.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the government cannot cut its way to a prosperous future and given that performance-based funding is another way by which to cut the budgets of postsecondary institutions and given that schools like Banff Centre, Keyano College, Olds College, and many others are facing an existential threat with the absence of immediate emergency money to keep the lights on at these institutions, will the minister follow the example set by other provinces, reverse the cuts to the sector, and commit to investing in our colleges, polytechnics, and universities?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta provides over \$2 billion through the Campus Alberta grant to our postsecondary institutions, but at the same time, we're focused on ensuring that those funds are delivered in an efficient manner. Let's look at some comparisons. The University of Alberta receives almost \$600 million in funding from the provincial government. The University of Toronto receives almost the exact same amount, \$600 million, yet the latter has over 50,000 more students. I am confident that with the resources that we have available, we can deliver a more efficient postsecondary system, and we will.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has the call.

Parole System

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the election campaign we committed to creating an Alberta parole board that would better hold criminals to account to protect public safety. Considering that there were cases of parolees breaking their parole for unspecified reasons, there is a need to end the revolving door for repeat offenders. Albertans are frustrated with this system, that does not make them feel secure. Can the minister explain to this House how a provincial parole board will better serve Albertans?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we've heard loud and clear from Albertans. They want more Alberta and less Ottawa in their justice system. They're tired of a revolving door. They're tired of Justin Trudeau's policies. They want people here from the province of Alberta to hold people accountable through our justice system, and that's exactly what an Alberta parole board will do. We're looking for Albertans to sit on that board from a wide range of backgrounds to make sure that we have the right policies for Albertans.

The Speaker: Leduc-Beaumont has the call.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Parole Board of Canada will still maintain activities for federal inmates in Alberta and continue to appoint members to the federal parole board, some Albertans may question its usefulness. Given that most inmates do not serve a full sentence in jail and are often released early on parole to be monitored in the community, it is important that citizens feel safe even when there is an early release. To the minister: how will the provincial parole board be different in scope as compared to the federal parole board?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The Alberta parole board will handle sentences under two years. This is where a lot of the frustration comes from the town halls. People that have offences, property crime – it's these offences that are currently considered by the Criminal Code as being kind of the smaller or lower penalty offences. By having an Alberta parole board, we can listen to communities, make sure that we respond to those needs in Alberta, and have common-sense solutions done through the Alberta parole board. It's made in Alberta. That's the right way to go.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given my time at the Edmonton Police Service – there were times when I investigated federal parolees who were in clear violation of their parole, yet their parole was not revoked. Given that a lack of consequences emboldens those who break the law and directly impacts people's faith in our parole system, to the minister: are issues like these going to be considered and fixed when implementing the new provincial parole board?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, thank you again for that question from the member. He raises valid concerns. Personnel is policy. We've heard our Premier say that, and I agree a hundred per cent with that. We're looking for common-sense Albertans to step up and be a part of this Alberta parole board and come up with common-sense solutions. That's why we're doing this. We need more Alberta and less Ottawa. It's the right thing to do to hold people accountable.

Also, on this side of the aisle we've come up with creative solutions like drug treatment courts, Mr. Speaker. The opposition opposes the expansion of drug treatment courts. They won't support the bill that'll allow that. Shame on them for that. We're looking for common-sense solutions on this side like the Alberta parole board.

Wage Supplement for Care Facility Workers

Ms Sigurdson: In April the Minister of Health promised essential service workers in continuing care facilities that they would get an immediate \$2-an-hour raise. Two months later the workers at 85 of these locations haven't seen a dime. The minister has put a lot more energy into telling people that this isn't his fault than into fixing his problem, but ultimately he must be judged by his results. Minister, the public health emergency is over, and you still haven't gotten this emergency funding to essential workers. Will you accept responsibility for your failure?

Mr. Shandro: I'm very happy to answer this question, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday, the reason for the delay for those workers in those sites is because of their union, the AUPE. I read with interest the message of one of their VPs, which ended up admitting exactly what I said yesterday, which was that the AUPE has filed grievances against the operators, which blocked the payment to the health care aides. The AUPE seems to make it clear in the statement as well that it's a pressure tactic to try and get government to fund wage top-ups for other occupations. Whatever the reason is, the AUPE needs to stop blocking the payments to those health care aides.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that care workers got their emergency pay increases in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island and given that there are unions and employers in these provinces, why has the Minister of Health in Alberta failed to execute this simple plan while his counterparts across the country got the job done?

2:20

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, there's a simple way for this to be resolved, and it's a letter of understanding between the unions and the employers, and I expect the employers and the unions to sit down and get this done. But, look, it's time for the NDP to stop being apologists for the union bosses and start standing up for the workers. It's time for them to start standing up for the workers and demand, like we are, that these workers get the money that they deserve. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the whole point of this funding is to protect seniors and improve their care and given that three-quarters of Alberta's COVID-19 deaths have been seniors living in continuing care facilities and given that the minister's failure means that seniors are still living in demoralized and understaffed facilities, to the Minister of Health: are you content to stand in this Assembly and point fingers when it's you who has failed to keep your promise by not protecting Alberta seniors during the pandemic, or are you, the minister, not responsible?

The Speaker: It seems as though the minister is excited. The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: That I am, Mr. Speaker. We promised these health care aides this payment. We're funding it. I expect the AUPE to help make it happen, not to block it. I expect the powerful union bosses who are writing the questions for the hon. member to also get out of the way and get the payments into the bank accounts for those workers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Agricultural Insurance

Mr. Dach: Quote: it was a monster; it destroyed everything in its path. End quote. This is Matt Sawyer, a farmer in southern Alberta, describing the damage to his farm after historic hailstorms devastated the area last week. While the storm devastation left a path of destruction and left many farmers with a great deal of stress, insurance companies are slow to react, dithering, effectively delaying immediate financial assistance to these farmers. To the minister of agriculture: what are you doing to help Alberta farmers deal with the aftermath of the hailstorm, the worst one in two decades?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a farmer I'm aware that hail does happen, and that's why farmers have crop insurance. It's one of our most successful business risk management programs that we do offer from AFSC. Something around 80, 90 per cent of farmers are enrolled in it, and they can also have additional hail insurance, that a lot of farmers do have. It is something that farmers do on a regular basis, year after year, make sure that they do have crop insurance to best manage their risks when it comes to hail.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This isn't a regular basis hailstorm. Given that the devastating effects of this storm come after other recent hardships, including drought, railway blockades, and China's rejection of grain imports, and given that Alberta's growing season is already so short that farmers say that a setback this early in the season, quote, puts them back as if they'd seeded just yesterday, end quote, and given that the Premier has seen this storm as an opportunity for photo ops and has offered nothing in the way of support to people whose homes and vehicles were damaged, to the minister: will you commit here and now that there are no stones left unturned in doing everything you can to help these farmers? I mean everything, not just the regular . . .

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We are doing everything possible, working with AFSC, to make sure that farmers will get the support that they get from damaged crops. But the member just mentioned rail blockades. That's something that Bill 1 – this government stood up for and defended our resources, our farmers, that have to use our rail lines and critical infrastructure here in the province. Almost every single member of the opposition came up and opposed all that good, hard work defending our farmers to make sure they get their products to market. That's something that on the government side, on this side of the House, is – we're going to stand up and defend farmers every day.

Mr. Dach: We know which side we are on, Mr. Speaker. Given that insurance providers and underwriters globally are altering their actuarial calculations to manage risk associated with climate change, a foreign concept to many on the government side, and given that hailstorms are projected to increase in frequency and severity as a result of climate change, will the minister confirm that the agricultural farm service corporation, or AFSC, fully incorporates climate change risk management into its suite of insurance products so that farmers can properly insure themselves against what they are now calling snowballs from hell?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, farmers across Alberta know that last year was the harvest from hell. There were about \$900 million of payments that went out through AFSC. They collected about \$700 million in insurance premiums from farmers. That is something where we're constantly working with AFSC to make sure that insurance programs and business risk management programs that farmers can use are actually responsive and actually meet their demands so that they actually can compete around the world, on a global stage, and make sure that they can do what they do best, which is produce food for Albertans and people around the world.

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

Fisheries Management

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much for getting that right, Mr. Speaker. After years of government inaction it's encouraging that anglers in Alberta had the opportunity to take part in a recent fishing engagement that took place last winter. Concerned anglers from all over the province were able to interact with Environment and Parks staff and share their views in person or online on the state of Alberta fisheries. While it seems the minister is listening and this is a step in the right direction, some of my constituents think the changes didn't go far enough. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: what is next for Alberta fisheries?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for an excellent question. He's correct: it didn't go far enough, but it went a long way. The reality is that to clean up the mess that the NDP made with fisheries in this province is going to take a couple of seasons. We're excited with the movement that we've made so far on this file. We'll continue to work with stakeholders across the province to be able to make those improvements in the seasons that are upcoming. I'm excited to tell you that it's working. We've seen a 20 per cent increase in angling licences already this year, which has a huge economic impact on our province in a positive way. To the hon. member, we'll keep working with his constituents to get it right.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you for that information, Minister.

Given that we are heading in a positive direction with Alberta fisheries and given that this government has committed to recognizing the economic and social benefits that fishing provides to local communities and given that we must all do our part to keep our fisheries viable, to the same minister: will our government continue to invest in hatcheries such as the Cold Lake fish hatchery as well as lake-stocking programs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the answer to that question is yes. In fact, we have work being undertaken right now on all four of our hatcheries across the province, including Cold Lake. Angling contributes \$600 million a year to Alberta's economy. In fact, for every dollar that we, the government, invest, we get \$20 in return when we invest in our fisheries. We're going to continue to work with our friends over at economic development and tourism as well as those in Alberta environment to make sure that we're conserving our species while providing angling opportunities across the province. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung will come to order because the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has the call.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. That's certainly great to hear.

Mr. Speaker, given that we are investing resources and capital into our hatcheries and fish-stocking programs and given that Winnifred, Lac La Biche, and Moose Lake's cormorant populations remain unchecked and are a major threat to these programs because the average cormorant can eat over a pound of fish a day and given that previous governments, under the authority of a private member's bill, were able to manage this issue, to the same minister: can you tell me if similar steps will be enacted to protect these fisheries and the efforts to keep them viable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of cormorants is a significant issue in this province. It's been going on for decades. The hon. member is correct. In the past it was managed through a private member's bill that passed inside this Chamber. The NDP stopped using that process while they were in power. I've instructed the department to go through a process to evaluate the science, come back to us with a plan to be able to manage cormorant populations with the goal of being able to manage the overall fisheries issue in the province. I know this is a very big issue in the hon. member's riding. Through you, Mr. Speaker, to him: he can go back home and tell his constituents that help is on the way.

Child Care Funding

Ms Pancholi: Earlier this year the Minister of Children's Services ended the benefit contribution grant and the staff attraction incentive to child care programs. At the time the minister said, quote, that she did not expect this to impact children and families. Well, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't true then, and it isn't true now. The loss of these grants meant that child care centres had to choose whether to cut staff salaries, raise parent fees, or some combination of both. Then the pandemic hit. Child care centres cannot be underappreciated or underfunded any longer. To the minister: will you commit to restoring these grants now so that child care centres can focus on staying open rather than choosing between their staff or their families?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Access to high-quality, accessible, and affordable child care for those who need it is not only hugely important to our province at the best of times but especially now, as we relaunch our recovery coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have reinvested \$18 million, which was what the sector asked for, as a COVID-specific response. We'll continue to listen to child care centre operators on how we can reduce red tape and help them to serve Alberta kids and families.

2:30

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that that sounds like a no and given that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that child care workers are, in fact, essential workers and given that attracting and retaining early childhood educators is cited by stakeholders as the number one biggest challenge for the recovery of the child care sector, to the minister: will you commit to providing funding to recognize the additional work educators are doing now, provide an incentive for qualified educators to return to work, and stabilize a demoralized and fragile workforce?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we know is that a high-quality workforce is the number one key to ensuring high-quality child care across Alberta. We know that other provinces recognize that as well. I am proud that we have maintained our wage top-ups and professional development funding for our early childhood educators to among the highest levels in the entire country. That is hugely important for us, and we'll continue to invest in our front-line workers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the child care sector saw up to 50 per cent turnover and huge gaps in terms of quality, accessibility, and affordability before the pandemic and given that parents will be making difficult decisions about getting back to work when there are so many uncertainties about school reopening and child care availability and given that the minister has not yet made a single move to attract people to work in child care or incentivize them to stay in the field, to the minister: what are your plans to ensure child care centres are open with qualified educators there to take care of our children when we need them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to comment that some of the instability in that sector came from a very poorly managed pilot project that was rolled out by the former government that chose winners and losers and did not respect parents across the province and listen to their needs. We will continue to invest in our early childhood educators. They are hugely important to high-quality child care. We'll continue to support them through some of the most generous benefits across the entire country.

Vocation-based Charter Schools

Member Irwin: Yesterday the UCP defeated our amendment to Bill 15, the so-called Choice in Education Act, 2020. Our amendment would have stopped the streaming of students into vocation-based education as early as kindergarten. The minister didn't address this issue when we raised it last week and again yesterday, so we want to give her the chance to do so today. Minister, do you support streaming kids as early as kindergarten and, if so, why? Please show your work.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, this is an absolutely ludicrous statement. The member opposite knows very well, or should know, that charter schools are required to follow the same programs of studies as public, separate, and francophone schools. That means upon graduation students attending vocation-based charter schools will complete the same core curriculum as all their colleagues attending other schools. This is clearly not streaming. Rather, it's an additional option for students to attend and improve in skills areas.

Member Irwin: Given that the research shows it's so important that, starting at a young age, a love of learning is sparked in our students and that as teachers and as parents we do this through encouraging kids' creativity and passions, not by pushing them into jobs, this isn't about opposing vocation-based education. The beautiful thing is that we already offer so many incredible career programs from which students can choose at the secondary level: CTS, dual credit, RAP, to name a few. To the minister: why are we adding vocation-based charter schools when Alberta is world-renowned for the programming that we currently offer?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, isn't it interesting to hear the socialists once again come out against experiential learning vocational education. We believe in pluralism in the education system, parental choice, and many different options, including, of course, charter schools and vocational schools, because we believe that at the end of the day a trade certificate has every bit as much value, merit, and worth as an academic university degree. When you look at the experience in the German system, the work experience that teenagers get helps to set them up for a successful life. That's something to be embraced and not discouraged.

Member Irwin: Absolutely. Given that no one on this side is disputing the importance of vocation-based education, careers education but that we're talking about supporting choice in education within a strong publicly funded system and given that 93 per cent of Alberta's parents choose public education for their kids and this government's own survey shows that the choices currently available meet their needs and we're hearing from parents that they choose public education that's well funded, that supports students with special needs, an option that this government isn't currently offering, why is this government pushing forward on something that the overwhelming majority of parents and stakeholders aren't asking for?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what kind of parallel universe does the NDP live in? The member just said that the government does not offer the choice of publicly funded education, but she just admitted that over 90 per cent of students are in conventional public schools in public or separate schools. Those schools are better and their outcomes are superior because of choice and competition in the Alberta system, the choice and competition that the NDP has always been opposed to. Why? Because they're governed by one principle: they want a union monopoly on everything.

Domestic and Gender-based Violence Prevention

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, we are living in unprecedented times. COVID-19 has required people to stay in their homes under stressful conditions, with many individuals under increased stress at greater risk of family violence. To the minister for the status of women: what help is available for individuals to access if they feel unsafe and want to move their family to safety and an alternate location but have a long-term lease?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. The government recognizes that during the COVID-19 pandemic there were people that were isolated and under extreme stress and at greater risk of family violence. The domestic violence leave program allows for 10 days of unpaid leave for victims of domestic violence and further to this the safer spaces program as well, which allows victims of domestic violence to end their lease agreement early without financial penalty. There are intensive case managers available through women's shelters that can also support and also the One Line, which has been a very, very successful piece of talk, text, and chat to be able to help out many families.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Given that the additional stress of social isolation and social distancing has escalated many already serious family violence situations to a new level and given that there are families dealing with sexual violence and not sure where to turn, can the Minister of Community and Social Services advise: what help has the government put in place to assist survivors?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. The government of Alberta is committed to addressing and preventing gender-based violence. During COVID we have dedicated an additional \$5 million to ensure women and children can isolate safely and access supports that they need to heal. We also provide the family violence info line at

310.1818, available day or night in over 170 languages. The info line offers online chat support from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and this enables people to seek help privately and safely even if they are just a room away from their abuser.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Given that indigenous women and girls in Canada are already at a greater risk of violence, with indigenous women making up 4 per cent of Canada's female population but 16 per cent of all women murdered in Canada between 1980 and 2012, can the Minister of Indigenous Relations advise on the work that the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, that was created in March of this year, has been doing to formulate our province's action plan to this important topic?

The Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members of the joint working group have already been busy giving feedback on ways to address issues of violence and the calls for justice. They're making recommendations on how to work with indigenous communities, other governments, and the private sector to recommend specific actions to combat violence against indigenous women and girls in ways that are culturally sensitive and take into account the unique conditions and experiences that indigenous communities face, including issues relating to the justice system, racism, domestic violence, and health supports. We all have a role to play in ending all forms of violence against indigenous women and girls and making Alberta a safer place.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Cross.

Economic Recovery

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has had to overcome several major challenges in the last few months. The most devastating, of course, was the COVID-19 pandemic, which has ground most economic activity to a halt, forced thousands of businesses to close, and threw tens of thousands of Albertans out of work. My question is for the Minister of Finance. What steps is our government taking to help facilitate the economic recovery in our province?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. When COVID-19 hit and the oil price crashed, the Alberta economy was sent for quite a loop. We immediately bolstered our health care system with an additional \$500 million to protect Albertans' health and well-being. We also put in a number of supports for individuals and businesses, including the emergency isolation program, which, again, allowed Albertans who were feeling ill to self-isolate and thereby combat COVID. We brought in a whole series of business supports that will position this province for recovery.

2:40

The Speaker: Calgary-Cross has the call.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. A perfect segue into the next question. Given that our province is also having to deal with a complete collapse of both demand as well as the price of oil and other energy products and given that our energy sector plays such a crucial role in both our province and the entire nation's economy, how is our government

ensuring that our oil and gas sector will stay afloat through these difficult times?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our goal as a government is to ensure that the critical energy sector and its capacity is maintained. We really believe that it's going to be the energy industry that leads this province and the nation to economic recovery. We provided a waiver to the Alberta Energy Regulator for levies for the industry. That's provided over a hundred million dollars, in fact \$113 million, of relief. We provided a \$100 million provincial loan to the Orphan Well Association, and we're stepping up where the federal government failed. We're investing \$1.5 billion in Keystone XL.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the stock market has been, to say the least, volatile over the past few months, unemployment is at a record high, new jobs are scarce, and economic activity has fallen drastically and given that many Albertan families are now struggling to pay their rent, their mortgages, and put food on their tables at the end of the month, can the minister inform the House on what our government is doing to increase economic activity and reverse the damage that these crises have inflicted on this province in the past few months?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ongoing financial support for Albertans and Alberta businesses is helping get them back on their feet, but, more fundamentally, we're bringing in long-term solutions that will really help our economic recovery. We're investing in infrastructure projects that will put Albertans back to work but, more importantly, improve our competitiveness and productivity, will attract private-sector investment, and create jobs for Albertans. We're continuing our relentless push to make the most competitive business environment possible. We know that that's the ultimate recipe to attract investment, create job opportunities and wealth for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will proceed to Introduction of Bills.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 26 Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to request leave to introduce Bill 26, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020.

If passed, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020, would allow the government to seek Albertans' guidance on initiatives beyond constitutional matters. Referendums enhance democracy by consulting Albertans on issues of importance. As the Fair Deal Panel recommended, Albertans want a real and direct say on laws and issues that affect them to best meet their current and future needs. This legislation will help us strengthen democracy and increase accountability, giving Albertans a louder voice and a direct impact on the actions of government.

I ask that we move first reading of Bill 26, the Constitutional Referendum Amendment Act, 2020. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

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

Bill 27 Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to request leave to introduce Bill 27, the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020.

This act would give the Minister of Municipal Affairs the same directive-making powers he has in municipal elections when a Senate election is held in conjunction with a municipal election. It also makes certain technical amendments, Mr. Speaker, to facilitate Senate elections here in the province of Alberta.

I ask that we move first reading of Bill 27, the Alberta Senate Election Amendment Act, 2020.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Glubish, Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Vital Statistics Act the Alberta vital statistics 2017 annual review.

The Speaker: Members, that concludes the daily Routine, and as such we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee

26. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly grant leave pursuant to Standing Order 57(1)(b) to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee to meet during the hours the Assembly is sitting.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader has the call.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move Government Motion 26. I believe that this motion is paramount. I believe it's important that the select special public health review committee and the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee, which we'll talk about shortly, be permitted to meet while the Assembly is sitting.

The reality is that because of the public health emergency that interrupted our intended sitting schedule this year, all members will now be in the provincial capital hanging out together for a good portion of July, I'll point out, doing significantly more work than our friend the Prime Minister and his party in the House of Commons, who still won't go back to full duty.

Now, I want to be clear, Mr. Speaker. Our intention will be to keep moving ahead with the important legislation of this government. That is where we're going to go. Despite the fact that some members of the opposition may not want us to legislate, we will continue to legislate.

However, we've been sitting in the afternoons already and in the late evenings and using the mornings for travel on Mondays and for

other business such as caucus, of course, and other committees throughout the rest of the week. For this reason it's not enough to expect that these committees will be able to do the significant amount of work that we have put in front of them in the months ahead unless they begin to meet at the same time that the Assembly is sitting.

I want to be clear, Mr. Speaker. This government was elected on a mandate to address the fundamental issues like those that will be dealt with by both of these select special committees. Our government has a very ambitious agenda for the remainder of this sitting and for the remainder of our mandate, and there is no good reason why the work of the select special committee should not be started right away at the same time as we work on legislation inside the Chamber.

The majority of government members do not have the luxury of being based here in the capital region like the majority of the opposition, so when we travel here, it's because our constituents are sending us here to do work and to achieve results for them, and for the same reason constituency breaks should not be spent travelling to and from the capital working on the important work of the committee, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I do hope that all members of the Chamber will support this important motion so that we can get our committees back to work.

[Government Motion 26 carried]

Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee

27. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly grant leave pursuant to Standing Order 57(1)(b) to the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee to meet during the hours the Assembly is sitting.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move Government Motion 27. I gave extensive remarks just a few seconds ago on the necessity of having both of these new select special committees be able to meet while the Chamber is sitting in this unprecedented summer sitting that we have in front of us.

I do, however, want to add just a couple of further thoughts on this in regard to other jurisdictions holding committees while the main Chamber is meeting. For example, in the Mother of Parliaments, Mr. Speaker, that I know you are well familiar with, which is, frankly, what we are fundamentally modelled after, in London members are expected to attend committees while the House is sitting. We can in fact look no further than the federal House of Commons, where this kind of scheduling is standard, and Members of Parliament are expected to manage House duty and to be present at committee to make the most of their days working in the nation's capital.

I see no reason why we can't do the same here in the Alberta Legislature, Mr. Speaker. I certainly know – I can speak on behalf of the government caucus – that when we come to Edmonton, we come to Edmonton to work, and when we don't want to work, we can go back home for our days off. But when we're in Edmonton, our constituents sent us here to work. We do hope that the NDP supports that and is prepared to get to work on some of this important work that's in front of both of those committees.

[Government Motion 27 carried]

2:50

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 24 COVID-19 Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

[Adjourned debate June 22: Ms Sweet]

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to add comments? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 24, the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I appreciate that the Minister of Health is introducing this piece of legislation in an omnibus format and that it affects very many bills here. I believe it amends across seven ministries and 15 acts, actually.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think that in this current state of public health emergency, well, currently not a public health emergency but in the nature of the global pandemic, wide-ranging changes are needed, and often some of these changes are housekeeping style or technical details that are just to be ironed out. So I appreciate that while normally I would be fundamentally opposed to trying to amend such a large amount of legislation in one bill, I think that in this case it's a unique circumstance, and I think that that's something that's okay.

I also understand that a number of the important extensions and existing responses that we had supported previously or proposed previously are now included in Bill 24 or extended in Bill 24. I appreciate that as well. I think that that's certainly a good step, and I think certainly Albertans will be pleased to see that we're able to continue some of these protections. I mean, I certainly think there are always going to be more protections that we can introduce, and I think certainly Albertans, whether it's families, businesses, or any Albertan, is going to say that there is always more the government can and should be doing. I think our opposition will continue to advocate on behalf of those constituents, on behalf of those Albertans, and on behalf of those stakeholders.

However, I am concerned that on top of perhaps not going far enough, this bill also does nothing to address some of the concerns that the government admitted and was widely criticized for around Bill 10. I think it's certainly interesting that when they gave themselves the excessive emergency powers and emergency powers that many in the public and in this Legislature considered to be unnecessary and to be an attack on the democratic traditions that we hold dear in this place – it's disappointing that we're not seeing some of those changes rolled back with Bill 24. We did see the government admit that some of those were not necessary and they were going too far, but unfortunately they haven't taken the opportunity even with this omnibus bill, even when we're changing 15 pieces of legislation, addressing, I think it's seven or eight ministries, even when we're doing all that, the government has not taken the opportunity to fix some of the problems they introduced just a few short months ago. I mean, I think it's a little bit disappointing.

I think I'm also disappointed and concerned perhaps around some of the things, around things like delaying the government's annual report to August because this government has, and just as recently as a few minutes ago here, Madam Speaker – welcome to the chair – stood in this place and talked about how they can do many things at once, want to use this Chamber and committees at the same time. They want to be able to come and govern and do the work of democracy and speak in this place. They can do all these things, and

it's so important that they continue to do that so that the MLAs get back to their constituencies and do constituency work.

Yet the government, then, goes and says: we want to delay the annual report until August. I don't think that's actually a very responsible piece or thing to do. I don't think that in this legislation that's very responsible. I don't think it's responsible for Albertans because we're essentially saying that the government's financial position will be hidden from Albertans, from the public for an additional two months – right? – and to be bringing it forward in August, when MLAs hopefully will be back in their constituencies and will be doing the work of the constituencies and trying to reach out to their communities. Instead of actually looking and then having the deeper conversations about what's going on with the government having the annual report, it's going to be passed and brought through in the summer when nobody will be in this place, when none of us will be in this Chamber and debating. I think that's quite disappointing. I think it speaks to the government's history of trying to hide from Albertans. It speaks to the government's pattern of trying to misdirect from their record, and I think that's disappointing as well.

It's something that we're seeing in a piece of legislation that while it has some good pieces and is indeed extending some of the protections that I think are important and is indeed bringing forward things that I think Albertans will be thankful for in some places, I think it's disappointing that we see just recently, of course, a paper-thin quarterly report, and then we see Budget 2020 jammed through with no real due process. Now, finally, when we can finally say: how did the budget do; how did that report hold up over time; how were all these things happening? Instead, the government is saying: well, they need to delay their annual report, right? I think that's pretty disappointing. I think it's pretty upsetting that the government will, on one hand, say it's so important that we're here in Edmonton doing the work, that even though their members are not from here in Edmonton – the majority of their members are from out of town – we're here to do work. We're here to do the important work of democracy and debate. We're here to do all these important things, including these two committees that now have to sit while the House is sitting.

Then, Madam Speaker, on the other hand, the government goes: "Well, we couldn't possibly get the annual report done. The annual report – woah, woah, woah, that's way too much." I think that's pretty concerning because, in our conversations and our understanding with offices like the Auditor General and other legislative offices, our understanding is that they're continuing all of their work, right? Their work is able to continue without delay. Indeed, many of them are doing that work from home or perhaps going into the offices with reduced staff roles or reduced capacity, and that's okay, but they're able to accomplish all of their goals. So if the independent offices of the Legislature are able to continue moving forward – indeed, my understanding is that there is very little, if any, delay for the majority of those offices – then why can't this government be straightforward with Albertans? Why can't this government be clear with Albertans and actually tell them what's going on with the annual report?

I think it's pretty disappointing, but we'll see what happens in August, I guess, Madam Speaker. Yeah. The amendment to when the annual report is coming forward is in Bill 24, right? That's one of the clauses in this bill. It's one of the 15 pieces of legislation that are being changed. It's quite a wide-reaching piece of legislation, so it's interesting because when we see Bill 24 – again, as I've said before, normally I would be fundamentally opposed to such a large omnibus piece of legislation.

Normally I would say that in this place we should not debate legislation that touches both the timing of the general report and

also licensing for child care spaces and also the Safety Codes Act and so many different things. Normally I'd say that when you're talking about, for example, the timing of the annual report, which this government is delaying and being nontransparent about, and then when we're talking about things like the licensing of child care spaces and how there are going to be certain waivers with regard to the two-year cooling-off period before someone is given their licence if the facility has applied before and it's been suspended or refused, or if we're talking about things like how the minister is going to have broad powers in regard to suspending certain aspects of the Safety Codes Act, which are all amended in Bill 24 here, normally that would be quite concerning. But as we are in a current global pandemic – and I understand that the government has suspended the public health emergency; however, even given that, I think it is important that we are able to move forward with some of these pieces of legislation very quickly.

That's why in this circumstance I think an omnibus piece of legislation is appropriate. I think that touching all of these different aspects is appropriate even if I don't agree with all of those changes, right? Madam Speaker, I think it's okay for me not to agree that the government should be hiding the annual report in the middle of the summer, in August, when MLAs are not in this place. I think it's okay for me to say that I don't necessarily agree or I have concerns that it is easier to apply for provision for a waiver if you're a child care space who had their licence suspended or refused rather than licensed spaces that are trying to renew and open right now. I think that I may not agree with some of the broad powers the minister is being given in the Safety Codes Act and the provisions that he will have the ability to use.

I may not agree with all of those things, but I think certainly that in this case of a public health emergency, the government does need the ability to move forward quickly with these powers that they think are necessary to ensure the best quality for Albertans and the best supports for Albertans as we move forward. I understand that there are certainly measures that are being extended, for example, that will allow us to make sure that Albertans are able to stay safe, stay healthy, and stay home. I think those are fundamentally the reasons that I'm pleased to be able to speak here today and look forward to some of the further debate.

As we move forward, I'm sure government members and opposition members will have more concerns, will have more questions, but, certainly, I think it's important that when we talk about omnibus legislation, we try to say: is it necessary? Because, normally speaking, governments use omnibus legislation to try and hide something, right? We think that when you're talking about amending 15 pieces of legislation that largely don't affect each other, you're trying to hide something. I think it is often difficult for opposition caucuses – many members that are currently in the government were in opposition at one point and understand that, for opposition caucuses with limited research budgets and limited research capacity, it can be difficult to understand large pieces of legislation like this. However, I think that in this case, certainly, we are doing our best to try and understand everything that this piece of legislation touches, every single piece that it will affect.

3:00

I mean, that's why we're going to be asking questions, for example, of the Minister of Municipal Affairs on what types of safety code changes he's going to be contemplating and what standard he's going to apply with his new authority. This legislation gives him quite broad reach in authority – right? – with the Alberta Safety Codes Act and safety codes. I think that's certainly something that we're going to be concerned about because we know that Alberta safety codes are very strict, and it is important that we

have these standards, particularly at this time, when there is a global health emergency and there is a global health pandemic. We understand that making sure that we have the ability to be fluid with these safety codes may be important. We may have to make changes very quickly to better react to the emergency. That's something that the minister may need to do, and I'm okay with that. I think the minister needs to have those powers. I think the minister, at least for a certain amount of time, needs to have those powers. I think, certainly, that the minister has an obligation to try and do the best possible job to support the communities that he has the authority over.

However, I'd like the minister to perhaps provide some examples of what the minister would think are reasonable changes that this legislation would empower him to use – right? – and what the minister would consider are reasonable steps to take that wouldn't have to come back to this place, that wouldn't have to come back to the Legislature and be debated. What would be considered reasonable in terms of changes?

The authority is quite broad. This legislation, again, as I've said before, Madam Speaker, is quite broad and is quite wide reaching, but I think the ministers that are responsible for each section that is being touched – and I understand that a number of portfolios, including Advanced Education, Children's Services, Justice and Sol Gen, Labour and Immigration, Municipal Affairs, and TBF, are all being affected, right? There are different authorities being granted to many different ministries. If each of those ministers could perhaps speak in this place and tell us why the changes in their portfolios are necessary, I think that would be beneficial to all Albertans, certainly to the opposition, who's trying to understand how Bill 24 will have effect across the province and how Bill 24 will have effect across all these different sectors.

For example, when we look at child care, we can say: what is the plan? We know help is needed more now than ever. My colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud has spoken to that many times in this place, whether it's in question period or in regard to different bills. Now we're looking at Bill 24, which introduces certain waivers for the provision of those licences for child care centres. Child care centres that had refused or suspended licensing with Bill 24 will now be allowed to reapply immediately – right? – with certain waivers. We know that there are many child care centres across the province that are already struggling to reopen, and that's been an ongoing concern throughout the pandemic. It's been difficult to receive child care, whether it was for a health care worker or any Albertan. Now we understand that the government is moving forward with some measures to try and open more child care facilities, and Bill 24 includes some of those measures. But changing those licensing standards, using Bill 24 to include these waivers: how does that help with the child care crisis? What is the minister's intent? What is the minister intending to actually implement, and what program is the minister intending to expand? I think these are all important questions.

When we look at this piece of legislation, when we look at omnibus legislation like this, we know it's complicated. We know there's a lot going on, and we know that it would be unreasonable, Madam Speaker, to expect the Minister of Health to answer all of those questions, right? We know, of course, that one minister must sponsor the bill. But, certainly, the ministers whom it affects and whose programs are being affected and whose scopes of power are being affected: those ministers will have the opportunity, and I will be pleased to hear from them as we move forward with this legislation with regard to how they intend to use their powers and how they intend to use those powers to better the lives of Albertans.

I think that, certainly, we need to see some more clarity. We need to see some more debate in this place, and we need to see some

more interest from the government here. It's going to be a long summer, right? We know we're going to be in this place for a long time. We know we're going to be debating different pieces of legislation in this place for a long time. We know that we may have to make changes again. We know that Bill 24 is not, obviously, the first piece of pandemic-related legislation that we've brought forward in this place, and it likely will not be the last. We know that there will be continuing effects of the pandemic and that there will be continuing health effects.

The ministers will have to get up in this place and explain to Albertans and explain to the opposition: were these powers sufficient? If they were not, what else will this government need? What other tools does this government need to fight the pandemic and ensure the safety of all Albertans and ensure the safety of every single family and ensure the success of every family and business? What other levers will the government need to pull? I think that's certainly something that we're happy to discuss with the government and that we're happy to keep debating. We do not necessarily have to agree on everything that's in the legislation. Like in this Bill 24 here . . . [Mr. Dang's speaking time expired] Oh, I'm out of time.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any members wishing to add comments or questions?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah, I would like to rise and add my voice to the debate regarding Bill 24, COVID-19 Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. As my hon. colleague just shared, this is certainly an omnibus bill. There are 15 pieces of legislation that it does touch, seven ministries that are impacted by this. Of course, it is, again, to support the government during this extraordinary time, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when we really are doing things much differently, and we need to do so that we can respond in a timely fashion.

We understand the purpose of this legislation, but we do have some questions, of course. I mean, the role of the Official Opposition is always, you know, to give sober second thought to what the government puts forward and bring our own views, our own values into play. Certainly, that's what we plan to do. In doing so, that can often improve legislation and make it more responsive, more appropriate for what it's meant to do. Of course, we know that this bill is meant to support the government to keep things running smoothly, keep people safe in Alberta throughout this extraordinary time of COVID-19.

As I said, we do have some questions, and one of the questions that I have is that this bill, actually, could have been a great opportunity to look back at Bill 10. Bill 10 was passed earlier, of course. Bill 10 gave the government extraordinary powers to handle the pandemic and, actually, you know, was tremendously far reaching, so much so that even some of their own members, members of the UCP, were concerned that the government had gone too far. Certainly, they put in these emergency powers, and there was no, for example, deadline for when they would end. Deadlines: sometimes we have to extend them, which some of this legislation before us does, but at that time, when they did pass Bill 10, none of that was in place. So this bill could have been an opportunity to sort of put some parameters around that legislation. Again, I'll just say that it was some of the concerns presented by their own members.

The Premier spoke publicly, saying that he would put some lawyers, actually, from government, the public service, to look into that, because he had some second thoughts about that when he received some of that feedback from his own members. That was

something that we as the Official Opposition had been concerned about from day one when we saw the legislation in Bill 10. So I guess that is a question that I have for the government right now. This would have been an extraordinary, appropriate, great opportunity for you to actually, you know, scale back some of that overreach in Bill 10. Unfortunately, we don't see that in this legislation. Perhaps there will be some friendly amendments that we can put forward for you to look at.

3:10

Having said that, I also just want to question that the annual reports of all of the ministries are being delayed. They are supposed to be due June 30, and they're going to be delayed until August 31. I mean, this is something that certainly we in the opposition are concerned about because I think that one of the basic tenets of good government is transparency. That means that we do put out public reports in a timely manner and that the citizens of Alberta can, through their own due diligence and their own understanding of their role in terms of democratic rights, see what the government is doing, what those particular ministries are doing. Now that's delayed.

Of course, there is a concern about the timing because it is, you know, at the end of the summer, I guess, August 31. Sometimes that's a time when – this is kind of an extraordinary time, so it may be a bit different – people aren't necessarily paying a lot of attention to what's happening in government, unfortunately, so that timing is a little bit problematic, I would say. I hope the government is understanding that tenet of democracy about transparency and how important it is.

Certainly, we are being challenged in this extraordinary time, but it seems to be a bit of a pattern of this UCP government that they're not necessarily respecting that tenet of transparency. We know this through several different things that they have done. One is to have a very thin sort of quarterly report that had very limited information. The Budget 2020 deliberations were truncated greatly so that we weren't given much time as an Official Opposition to be able to debate things in the House.

I'm a member of the private members' bills committee, and in that committee it's been very challenging for the opposition to get any of their bills debated in this House. You know, it doesn't mean that you have to pass that legislation, but have that transparent process of deliberations so that all Albertans can know about it and members can contribute to that debate.

You know, I'm citing these examples just to ask the government to look at this, because it is kind of a pattern of the UCP government that they are lacking transparency in their work. I think it's very important for good government that people know what's going on. If bills aren't debated, if things are happening during the summer holidays, it's harder for people to be aware of those things.

You know, I don't want to suggest that the government is not wanting that because I think that this is sort of fundamental to some of what I understand of the UCP, that they're grassroots and want to make sure people have input. But I think some of these basic ways of making decisions around not giving much time for debate stands in the way of good, transparent government so that there is a strong democratic process. I guess I am questioning that about the delay in the annual report and pushing it off, you know, to deep into the summer. This is how I would describe that.

I mean, there's not a whole bunch in terms of my critic area, which is Seniors and Housing, but it does talk about extending – this is under the labour ministry – COVID-19 related temporary layoff provisions from 120 to 180 days. This has already actually come into effect during first reading. That's a good thing. Certainly, we support that. Absolutely, we want to make sure that people can

keep their jobs. Also, extending the restriction on working at multiple long-term care facilities by 18 months: of course, this is extremely crucial because we know that, actually, 77 per cent of the COVID deaths have happened in continuing care facilities. Some of that has to do with that early on people were working at multiple sites. Unfortunately, that created, you know, a tremendous tragedy in our province. There are still some sites that don't have that exclusivity, and I think that that's a very important thing to make sure of so that seniors are well cared for and kept safe, so I certainly support this extension of the labour code, making sure that people are working at single sites.

I just encourage the government to make sure that every site is included. Last time the Minister of Health was asked this question, I think he said that four sites did not have that happening, and I think that it should be universal. It should be all continuing care sites. Make sure that it is a single site and that those workers are protected, that they, you know, make sure that they have full-time wages. I mean, they're often very vulnerable workers who are low paid and may not have a high level of education, and they don't have a lot of alternatives. Being asked to just work in one facility means that they need to be compensated for that. If they worked half in another facility and half in this one, all of a sudden they only have 50 per cent of their regular paycheque. I hope that the government is really looking at that and making sure that these workers, these vulnerable workers, who are doing extraordinary work making sure seniors are safe in these facilities – we know that oftentimes they're working very long hours. We just want to make sure that they are supported.

This is something that this legislation is extending for 18 months. We're pleased to support that. That's very important.

I'm just sort of skipping around but, as I said, there are so many ministries involved in this that there are quite a few different aspects to deal with. In terms of Children's Services one of the things that this legislation is doing, which I see as a problem, is weakening licensing standards for child care centres. Certainly, as a mom of three boys, a single mom for most of that time, I mean, I relied heavily on accredited, high-quality child care in my community, and, you know, I chose that at that time to make sure that my children were well cared for when I was at work and I had other obligations. I certainly don't want to have parents of today having that watered down. Just as we want seniors to be cared for at high standards, we want to make sure that children are cared for at high standards. I am kind of confused by this. It doesn't seem to make much sense that at this time that would be brought forward in this legislation. We want to make sure that child care centres provide an educational, stimulating, sort of child-centred experience for children in Alberta, and weakening those standards will stand in the way of that.

You know, because there are so many pieces of legislation being touched by this omnibus bill, some are good, and some aren't so good, so it's hard to sort of say that we're in support or not in support, as I've said. I guess some of the things that fall on the not support side are just, like, how come these annual reports are being delayed? Also, how come Bill 10 – you know, some of the overreach of Bill 10 isn't addressed in this. As I said, this would be a great opportunity for that. But the extension of 18 months for the single-site working is good and also extending the COVID-related temporary layoff provisions from 120 days to 180. These are positive aspects of this legislation. It is kind of a bit of a mixed bag, Madam Speaker, what this is about.

3:20

Certainly, we understand that it's an extraordinary time. COVID-19 means that governments do need extra powers, so Bill 24 is

outlining them for a longer period of time. We've started to open up in phase 2, and we know that here in Edmonton we've had five restaurants have to close again, which has caused a lot of problems, because of the spread. We're realizing, really, how careful we must be as a society. You know, people talk about, even our chief medical officer, Dr. Hinshaw, talks about the second wave. I mean, certainly we're not in the second wave yet. We're still only in the first, so we do need to plan ahead and make sure that governments have the authority, the ability to deal with this.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in second reading of Bill 24, the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. I won't speak for too long because I know that my colleagues have spoken at length about the number of issues that this bill addresses and that it largely is meant to extend some of the provisions and orders that were in place during the pandemic in a post public emergency health order situation, as we are now in. For the most part we understand the need to do that and do not have concerns with that.

I do hope, though, that when we get into Committee of the Whole – of course, not to presume the outcome of second reading of this bill, but should this bill pass second reading and we get to Committee of the Whole – there will be some discussion about some of the, I would say, other provisions that are within the act. I will begin by saying that I, too, share my colleagues' concerns with respect to the lack of – well, we have an opportunity here with this bill to address some of the concerns that have already been raised by all members of this House with respect to Bill 10, the public health amendment act. We, including myself, raised those concerns about potentially the overreach and the very broad authority that the changes put forward by this government in Bill 10 made to the authorities of ministers to create new legislative schemes outside of regulation or outside of bringing it before this House.

I understand that the Premier and members of the UCP caucus have similarly shared those concerns, which is why we do have a committee that's been established, but here we have right now a piece of legislation before this Assembly that could at this time revoke some of the changes that they made, which we believe were broad overreach, and could address that. The committee can continue its work to look at the Public Health Act as a whole, but the government is not taking that opportunity.

I also share concerns about the fact that this government is delaying fiscal accountability by delaying the distribution and dissemination of annual reports, which is what Albertans use to hold this government accountable for the budget. By the way, this most recent budget was pushed through in an epically rapid fashion, limited debate substantially, from my understanding unheard of before in this Legislative Assembly. Now we're seeing once again that the government is further limiting transparency around its accountability by delaying the distribution of annual reports. We know that we are still working. The public service is still working. We know the Auditor General's office is still working, so I do not understand why we're having a delay on that, and I share that concern.

The one question that I want to raise at this opportunity, and I hope that when we get into Committee of the Whole perhaps the Minister of Children's Services will address it, is some of the changes with respect to the Child Care Licensing Act. Now, I want to begin by saying that I know one of the key changes in Bill 24 is to really extend the new health and safety guidelines that were

established in accordance with the chief medical officer of health's advice. These were issued before the public health emergency order expired. For example, it did a few other things, but one of the main things that it did was that it raised the cohort numbers within a child care program so that child care programs could have a cohort of 30. I know that that's allowed a number of child care programs to continue to operate in a more viable fashion. Of course, they still have restrictions with respect to ratios between licensed educators and children, but this bill is simply extending what was put out under the public health emergency order to now be incorporated going forward, and I support that. That makes sense, and I think it's appropriate so that child care programs can continue to operate as they are.

I know that they are looking forward – I think we all are – to a world where we won't need such strict guidelines, but of course we are not there yet, and we may not be for some time, so it is very important that our child care licensing provisions, our acts, our regulations, our orders, guidelines continue to put the health and safety of children and educators top of mind. I support that.

However, I do have a concern with respect to one provision of Bill 24. This is within section 2(2)(c) of Bill 24, and it amends the Child Care Licensing Act. Specifically, subsection (2.2) of Bill 24 indicates that a waiver may be granted to individuals or operators who have either applied to be a licensed child care program in the past or who have failed to meet the standards for renewal of their licence. This change in Bill 24 allows the standard two-year period of time. It's a cooling-off period, really. Once an operator or an individual fails to meet the licensing standards under the Child Care Licensing Act right now, they're required to wait two years before they can reapply. Bill 24 seeks to amend that by essentially waiving that two-year period.

I'm hoping to hear some direct comments from the Minister of Children's Services as to why she believes this is necessary. I raise this because, of course, we are currently at a time when a number of child care programs have still not reopened after the pandemic. In particular, as of June 1 I believe it was roughly about 30 per cent. I understand those numbers have gone up now. That is good news, although child care programs reopening does not mean that they're necessarily viable into the future.

In this province prior to the pandemic we had close to 2,800 child care programs across the province, and if less than half of those have reopened, I believe that we have a lot of work to do in this province to make sure that those programs, which were already meeting licensing standards, were operating and providing child care directly – our focus should be on making sure that already-licensed programs are able to get up and running again. That should be our priority. I am questioning why in this act we seem to be focusing on making it easier and quicker for programs and individuals who failed licensing standards prior to reapply for licensing.

To me it's an interesting choice of priority because I think that we should be focusing on making sure that our existing, licensed operating programs are up and running. To that end I have been proud and will continue to stand in this House and to advocate for not only a long-term strategic plan for the recovery of our child care sector, which is what absolutely every reputable economist in the country has been calling for as part of our economic recovery post pandemic, to make sure that we have a strong and viable child care sector so that Albertans and Canadians can get back to work.

Let's be clear, Madam Speaker. That is necessary because women were hit the hardest as a result of the pandemic. It is women who lost the majority of the jobs, who lost their hours. It is women who are providing the vast majority of unpaid caregiving, whether it be child care or elder care. We know that getting women back

into the workforce should be the number one priority because those are Albertans that need to get back to work, and until we have a child care system in place that's viable, that is affordable, that is accessible, and that is high-quality, we will not get more women back into the workforce. That should be our number one priority. I've been calling for that long-term strategic plan from this minister for some time as, more importantly, beyond myself as Official Opposition critic, that is what the sector is calling for. That is what the stakeholders, educators, parents are calling for because they will not be able to get back to work unless child care is there.

I've heard ministers in this House stand up and speak about – I mentioned the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. When asked about child care, the response is about getting more women into the trades. That's great; we do need to get more women into the trades. But women can't get into the trades, they can't do the training, and they can't take those jobs unless they have child care. Child care is the underlying pin that allows for all those other things to happen. We need a long-term strategic plan to invest and to support our existing child care system, not focus on trying to open up the system to those operators and individuals that had failed licensing. Why is it that so far that is the only concrete change that we have seen brought forward from the Minister of Children's Services since the pandemic hit? The only concrete change she's brought forward is buried in Bill 24, and it would allow previous operators who failed licensing to potentially apply sooner. That is not a long-term strategic plan, and I don't understand why that is the priority right now and why we're not seeing legislation that's actually calling to make our system viable again. I hope to hear what the intention was behind this change.

3:30

I also must highlight, Madam Speaker, that this change does not address the immediate crisis that's facing the child care sector, that requires immediate stabilization. Since the pandemic hit in mid-March, this government has been sitting on money in its budget for Children's Services, sitting on money that would have gone out to support wage top-ups, that would have gone out to support subsidies for parents. That money has been held back. Now the minister has announced \$19 million in support, but she's only delivered \$11 million so far, and that is barely a drop in the bucket for what is in her budget right now to support the child care sector. We cannot wait any longer in this province for the minister to dither and to hold back dollars that are already in her budget to support child care while our operators are failing, are going to be closing, and parents need affordable and accessible and quality child care.

To see the first piece of legislation come forward in this session, when we are facing an unprecedented crisis in child care, that deals with child care licensing and this is what we see: I have to say that I'm immensely disappointed. I'm hoping to hear from the minister, perhaps later on in debate on Bill 24, what her plan is and how this small change, to focus on allowing individuals and operators who have failed licensing before to apply sooner, is somehow going to address the dramatic and historic problem that we have right now in our child care sector, that is going to hold back women from participating in economic recovery. If women are held back from participating in economic recovery, Alberta is held back, because this is not just a women's issue. This is our economic future, and we all have a vested interest in making sure all Albertans have the ability to go back to work and participate in our economy. I hope there's more coming because, frankly, this is disappointing.

So while I'll support this bill with the intent, because it's going to extend some of the provisions that were done under the public health emergency order with respect to extension of guidelines and orders that were made that affect workers and that affect even child

care health and safety regulations – I will continue to take this opportunity to call for immediate and substantial action by this government and by the Minister of Children's Services to listen to the child care sector. If she's truly committed, if this government is truly committed to getting Alberta back into an economic recovery, they need to take this more seriously than they are.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 24 in second reading, the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. We've heard members discuss the incredible impact that this is going to have across several ministries. We know that there are multiple ministries that are being impacted: Health, Advanced Education, Children's Services, Justice and Solicitor General, Labour and Immigration, Municipal Affairs, Treasury Board and Finance. When we're talking about the unusual circumstance of this pandemic, we are in a hundred per cent agreement that all of the ministries need to come together, to work together to best address the pandemic. I think that that's something where this side of the House agrees with the government, that there's something that needs to be done, and we're going to continue to work together to ensure that that work does take place for the safety of all Albertans.

When we look at this piece of legislation, which we've heard being referred to as omnibus legislation, there are some concerns about what we were hoping to see in this. Specifically, we've heard it mentioned a few times now regarding Bill 10, which was a previous act that had been passed in the Chamber regarding the public health amendment act. It was something that I know myself and my colleagues heard considerable concerns about. They were hoping that when this piece of legislation, Bill 24, came to be debated, they would see that some of the sweeping powers that were implemented under Bill 10 would be revoked.

I know that there was concern about some of the authority that this Bill 10 had provided to government. There was a sense of mistrust within constituents with government in making these sweeping changes, and there was a hope that the government and the Premier would fix that. Unfortunately, we don't see that in this piece of legislation. We're definitely hearing that there's mistrust in terms of transparency, in terms of the need for such power when it comes to the pandemic. Albertans agree that there needs to be legislation in place that supports the pandemic and the response that's required by government. However, they want to know what that response looks like. They want details. They want it to make sense. Unfortunately, having these sweeping powers not addressed in here is concerning to many constituents that I'm hearing from, Madam Speaker.

Another concern that we've heard is the request to delay with their reporting of the budget. Initially it was to be brought forward in June, June 30. Now, with this Bill 24, they're asking for a delay to occur until August. Now, it's unclear why this delay should occur when we know that the Auditor General is meeting, there's the ability to complete a report, and Albertans want to know what the financial status is right now.

We keep hearing about things: "There isn't money for this" and "We can't afford that" and "We're focusing on pandemic issues." There are some questions, and I believe that Albertans have the right to know what those answers are. When we look at the budget, we should be able to go through it and clearly identify where money

is being spent, what the budget looks like so that there's a general understanding within all industries where the gaps are, where more services could be provided, where more services should be provided.

Having that taken away in June and delayed until August is concerning. We are sitting in chambers until at least the end of July, so had it been brought forward for June 30, the original date, it would have provided the opportunity for members to discuss what was happening. It would have provided opportunities for us to question the report and go through it and ask those questions that our constituents and our stakeholders are asking.

Unfortunately, because we are likely not going to be in session that late, when the proposal for the new date is, it provides an opportunity for the government to slip in the report when there aren't very many people that are paying attention to what's going on. People are tuned in now. They're paying attention. They're watching. I know this because many reach out to my constituency and express concerns and have questions. They would like to know what the financial status is, and unfortunately this bill delays that. So there's a fear that there's something that the government is trying to hide. Why are they delaying this process? Why are they bringing it forward when there's nobody sitting in the Chamber? It'll be at the end of summer, when families are busy getting ready to go back to school. It's just creating some uncertainty and some discomfort, absolutely, with the lack of transparency that we've seen over and over and over again from this government.

I would like that to be addressed and to have some answers come forward about: why this delay? What is the significance of delaying it? Why is there not an ability to do it right now, when we know that, like I said, the Auditor General is meeting, when reports can be done? It's all work that can be done remotely. Many of us are continuing to work remotely all over the province. It, unfortunately, sometimes can be an inconvenience when you're relying on slow Internet or dropped calls, those types of things, but it's work that absolutely can be done. I'm curious what the reasoning behind that is, and I look forward to hearing the minister address those in the remarks when we're debating.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I have to say a huge shout-out to members on this side of the House, specifically the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, when it comes to their critic portfolios, Status of Women as well as the critic for Children's Services. Now, I know that I spoke many times in the House about my previous experience working with Children's Services. This piece of legislation addresses child care and the licensing specific to that, so when it comes to the advocacy that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has had, it's something that I know she's taken very seriously and something that I know many Albertans have reached out about, because I've heard it in my community as well as her talk at length in the House about others that she's heard from.

3:40

As a former staff with Children's Services, also as a mom who had her children in daycare, I think that there's a significant importance to the standards that we hold for those that are looking after our children. I know that as a mom I was parent liaison at my child's daycare, so I met regularly with the staff and with the parents to talk about things that were going on in the child care centre, things that perhaps could be improved, things that were working really well. As a team we all came together to talk about the best way to do that for our children.

So when we look at what this piece of legislation is doing – and it's asking to waive the two-year cooling-off period for someone who, unfortunately, has been refused a licence or had a licence and had it suspended – it's concerning that this two-year period is being waived when we have clear standards about what is required to maintain your licence as well as to apply for a licence. I'm nervous that the supports that are needed for the already existing licences aren't in place. Those child care facilities that are ready to reopen are licensed. We know that they have high-quality, affordable child care opportunities. Why would we look at putting our children at risk in waiving a licence requirement for someone who's lost it or didn't qualify in the first place?

That's a concern that I know parents are going to have because so many parents make heartbreaking decisions to leave their children sometimes. When they leave their first child, their second, their third and go back to work, it's a big decision because your children are in these facilities for most of the day. I know it creates anxiety. I know that when I first left my oldest at a daycare, the stress and the investigating that I did as a mom to go in and watch and observe and do drop-ins and check in and kind of bring my child for play dates just to see how he was interacting with staff, my comfort level, his comfort level: it was a process, and part of the process was looking at their licensing and their accreditation, what their standards were, what their expectations were. I mean, I could be a little bit neurotic in wanting to know if they had ever failed anything, so having those discussions, you know, "What caused this concern, how did you rectify it, and how is it mitigated?" those types of things.

When government has clear expectations in place prior to COVID, which is a two-year cooling-off period, which seems like a reasonable standard, why is that being waived? I don't have a clear understanding of why that condition would be removed, especially when it comes to our children. We know that there are children that require child care, and there are great spaces available right now. So I look forward to hearing from the Minister of Children's Services to identify what the reasoning is for that. I look forward to more debate on this in second reading as well as when we move to Committee of the Whole.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up my comments. 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-Castle Downs.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate at second reading?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 15 Choice in Education Act, 2020

The Acting Chair: The committee has under review amendment A4 on Bill 15, the Choice in Education Act, 2020. Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to say a few words in regard to the amendment brought forward on the Choice in Education Act, 2020. This amendment that was brought forward by our caucus talks about articles 28 and 29 of the convention on the charter of rights of the child. They certainly are high-minded and universal articles, both 28 and 29. We believe that it helps to strengthen our commitment to education in the broadest possible way here in the province of Alberta. Indeed, we do have quite a lot of choices in education here in the province of Alberta that have been enshrined in law and convention for a long time in the province. I've always been of the opinion that the existence of those different choices between education – public education boards, the Catholic boards, our francophone boards, our charter schools, our private schools, and our home-schools – help to create a fabric of, I guess, healthy competition and a good way by which to learn and provide the best education for all.

Indeed, I'm always very proud to acknowledge – I will again here today – the fact that the vast majority of Albertans do choose public education and/or Catholic education here in the province because people vote with their feet, right? You pick the best quality schools that you can find in your area. Dollars to doughnuts, in the four corners of the province that choice becomes obvious, right? The public schools, the Catholic schools in each of our school districts provide very top-quality education that is second to none, quite frankly, in not just Canada but around the world. I mean, the choices that we do have available to us, I guess, help to, you know, keep everybody on their toes, and I think that that's a fair deal as well.

Anyway, article 28, which this amendment speaks to, talks about the rights to education on a basis of equal opportunity and, in particular, especially:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and . . . free to all;
- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, [and to] make them . . . accessible to every child . . .

Indeed, we believe that this is self-evident to be true.

And to provide education based on the capacity of every appropriate means, and to

- (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
- (e) . . . to encourage regular attendance at schools

and make active attempts to reduce dropout rates at all opportunities.

And to take

appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered . . . consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention

and, indeed, to the law.

And then that government

shall promote and encourage international cooperation [regarding] education . . . to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world.

3:50

These are all, Madam Chair, very high-minded principles that we believe, as I say, are self-evident and do contribute to the strength and the diversity of our education system here in the province of Alberta, a system that we should all take great pride in, but we should remain eternally vigilant as well to ensure that each of these provisions in article 28 is subscribed to and that we make every effort to ensure that we invest as a priority in education every step of the way.

Article 29, the other half of this amendment, talks about that the education of a child should be directed to:

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms . . . enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

- (c) The development of respect for the child's parents . . . [their] cultural identity,

and for national values of the place where a child is living.

Article 29 also talks about:

- (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship [of] all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- (e) . . . respect for the natural environment;

and so forth.

Again, these are elements of a strong education system, and they are elements that I would find it hard to believe any members of this Legislature would take exception to. It's an opportunity, whenever we do open education legislation, to ensure that it retains its very sharpest elements around these issues, right? We know we want to teach basic mathematics education and communication and language and so forth, but we also want our schools to reflect the highest principles of our society and to help to build society in the broadest possible way. Every time we remind people about the importance of education, you know, it's all fine to attach words and ideas to these things, but you need to make sure you make the investment and the commitment every step of the way to ensure that we have an equitable universal education system of the highest quality and that we have choice in education but that we are also maintaining the very fundamental principles of citizenship and skills and confidence in our young people to ensure that they have a prosperous future and also have fulfilling and confident and balanced physical and mental support every step of the way.

These are pretty basic principles. I'm sure that all members would agree to the inclusion of articles 28 and 29 to Bill 15, and I welcome everyone to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

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

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020. Are there any hon. members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to move an amendment. I will hand that over. I'll read it in for the benefit of the committee. I move this amendment on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I move that Bill 15, the Choice in Education Act, 2020, be amended as follows: (a) by striking out section 5; (b) by striking out section 11(b)(ii).

I will await your instructions.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, this amendment will be known as amendment A5.

Are there any hon. members wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Yes. Thank you. The purpose of moving this amendment is to return us to the previous model with respect to home-schooling. I think we all know that, by far, the vast majority of individuals who home-school their children do an excellent job of that. In fact, I've had family members who have been involved

in that, and in some cases they, in fact, do, yeah, a fantastic job, as good an education as you could receive anywhere. Certainly, this isn't meant to suggest otherwise.

However, it is important that there be oversight. Rules don't exist because, you know, 99 per cent of the population follows them. Rules exist because of the 1 per cent of the population who don't follow them. The fact that we have a law against murder isn't because we think everyone is going to go out and murder someone. It's because there is a small percentage of the population who will do that. So this is intended to bring us back to the previous model of home-schooling to ensure that there is some oversight, again, not for the 99 per cent of people who will do a good job but for that 1 per cent who may not be teaching in accordance with human rights or in accordance with current curriculum or in accordance with modern standards around science.

I think, you know, these things are incredibly important. As a child is growing up, if we lose the opportunity to teach them critical and relevant information during certain developmental periods, we may lose that opportunity forever. The reason I think this is so incredibly important is because the justice system is where we see the fallout from these oversights. If a child doesn't have the opportunity to learn, if they're not able to develop the skills in order to operate . . . [interjections] Folks.

The Acting Chair: Order.

Ms Ganley: Okay, we're not schoolchildren, ladies and gentlemen.

If they're not able to operate in a manner that interacts with society appropriately – it's actually a very nice little segue from the amendment I'm proposing here because the point here is that it's absolutely critical to educate children on, you know, appropriate societal interactions at the moment when they are ready to receive that information. If you miss that window, sometimes it seems you can never make up for that.

I think my point here is, again, that we need to ensure that oversight is occurring, because there are instances in which parents don't act in the best interests of their children. They are definitely not the majority of the instances. In the majority of the instances parents are absolutely acting in the best interest of their child. But as someone who myself is a parent, I don't think it's wrong for there to be oversight of my interaction with my child. If any parent were to be in a position where they put their child at risk, whether that's physical risk, mental risk, emotional risk, or risk of not receiving the public education that is owed to every child in this province, then I think that it is right and that it is good for the system to be able to step in to protect that child.

Again, I want to be really clear because it's often the case that when you propose an amendment like this that suggests oversight of someone, someone suggests that you're saying that none of these people are doing it well. That absolutely, fundamentally is not the case. Again, the vast majority of parents are going to act in the best interests of their children, but unfortunately we know that that's not going to be the case a hundred per cent of the time, so it's really important that there be some oversight of the curriculum being taught to children. We're not suggesting that there be massive oversight or that there be massive interference. In fact, I think the home-schooling system that we had in the province previously was working fairly well. I don't think that it's necessary to sort of untether that home-schooling from oversight of a board. I think that a board can provide curriculum. They can provide guidance.

4:00

The thing is that these aren't even necessarily things that people are doing on purpose. You know, sometimes people will have

beliefs or values that are not in keeping with modern scientific evidence. For instance, there are people out there who question whether the Earth is round. There are people out there who question whether evolution is, in fact, science. There are a number of other instances. There are people out there who question medicine as an entire field. Those people have those beliefs, but their children deserve the opportunity to see that there are different beliefs. I think it's incredibly important that we have this oversight because we don't need people raising their children to believe that the Earth is flat. In fact, at a minimum we would like the children to be able to see that there is a diversity of views on that issue.

I think it's incredibly important that we move this amendment, that we pass this amendment because, at the end of the day, it is the child who is the most important thing. That is a fundamental principle in the acts in this province which govern family law, that the best interests of the child are paramount. When you talk about two parents or even more than two parents fighting over custody of a child or access to a child or whether a child will go to a certain school or whether they'll take ballet lessons, I mean, all of these things are things that come forward with fair frequency.

The test that is at the heart of that is: what is in the best interest of the child? Fundamentally it is considered the case that the system can make some decisions around that. Not all of the decisions, certainly, but in the case of a dispute there can be intervention. I think the point here is to keep the best interest of the child as the central focus of the Education Act as well. There should be some oversight, not for the 99 per cent of people who are going to do it well but for the other 1 per cent because those children deserve to learn to read. They deserve to learn science. They deserve the best of what our educational system can give them. They deserve to grow up to be the best adults that they can. You know, most children are born naturally curious and naturally open-minded. They want nothing more than to learn, and I think that as a society we owe them the opportunity to do just that.

With that, I will thank my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for all of her incredible work with amendments to this act generally but specifically for bringing forward this amendment. I think it is incredibly important that all children, regardless of where they're being educated, have some access to oversight to ensure their safety, to ensure their education.

With that, I will urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, the committee has under consideration amendment A5. Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to amendment A5, an amendment that I think is important and is something that would make a bad bill better. I think that's language that we use quite often here in this place, but it truly is interesting when we see a bill like this because it's a bill that doesn't accomplish any of the goals it sets out to do. But we can try to make that a little bit better. I'd like to thank my colleague for introducing this amendment.

I think pretty clearly we understand here. I understand, and my opposition colleagues understand as well that home-schooling is a very viable education model. It's a very viable education model that is used by many families. Some of those families I know myself personally, and my colleagues here I know have spoken to their experience with it as well. Certainly, it allows you to have a wide berth of experience and opportunity, particularly where there are

students who have differing needs in terms of education systems that perhaps a traditional publicly funded school, a public or Catholic school, or a charter school may not be able to meet. That's why parents are able to have that opportunity to provide that enhanced education that will have targeted supports where they need to be and when they need to be, and I think that's very valuable.

I think we have a very strong system here in Alberta, and we have a system that provides excellent results and that has very rigorous standards here in Alberta that is recognized by places like postsecondary institutions and employers. I think that's all very positive. I think it's disappointing that this bill in, I believe, sections 5 and 11(b) basically takes away a lot of those standards, right? It takes away the ability for us to have this high-quality education provided for students no matter where they are in the system.

No matter whether the student is in a home-school situation or a publicly funded or a charter or a private school situation, we know that, generally speaking, the standards of that education will be the same. The level of education will be, generally speaking, approximately the same. This government is actually suggesting that we should lower those standards, that we should take away those regulations of attaching home-schooling parents to school boards or school jurisdictions. I think that's disappointing because, like my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo had spoken to earlier, it is absolutely – sorry; Calgary-Mountain View. My apologies, Madam Chair and to my colleague here. As Calgary-Mountain View had spoken to earlier, it is an opportunity for many of these children and many of these students to learn in different ways.

Certainly, we understand that they should have the same expectations as every other student. They should be expected to meet the same criteria as every other student, they should be expected to reach the same certifications as every other student, and they should be expected to have the same level of standard as every other student. The vast majority of parents and the vast majority of home-schooled students excel in their classes and excel in their learning, but a lot of that is due to the rigorous standards we have in place, right? A lot of that's due to the ability of the curriculum, for example, to be provided through a school board or learning materials to be provided through a school board or other materials like that that assist parents in having a better education for their kid, for their student, that assist parents in being able to provide the best possible home-school education.

We know that in many of the situations where home-schooling is offered and home-schooling is chosen by a family, it's because a student has certain needs that are difficult to teach in a traditional classroom setting, and that's okay. We support those parents, and we want those parents to have the best possible opportunities. To ensure that those opportunities are standardized and to ensure that those opportunities are fair and that those students are receiving the same curriculum, the same education as every other student in the province, the same examinations, and the same values and cores as every other student, we need to ensure that they are attached to one of our accredited school boards.

Of course, we have many accredited school boards across the province, and many of these school boards are attached to different home-schooling individuals. They do things like provide materials and things like textbooks or worksheets or workbooks, particularly in the younger years especially, for many of these students, and that's a good thing, right? We think it's a good thing that the parents are able to have that choice, are able to make decisions for their students and say: we believe that our student, our child, will have the best quality education at home; we'll be able to meet their needs in the best possible way, and we'll be able to accommodate them in

the best possible way. Parents absolutely have the right to make that decision, and they have the choice to make that decision.

What they also need to understand is that we sort of have this expectation that when those students are graduating from their home-school program, when those students move on – let's say that they start their home-school education at four or five years old or six years old, and they move on through all their years, and 12, 13 years later they graduate, as it were – whether they enter a trade school or another postsecondary institution, a university or a college, or whether they want to enter the workforce directly, whatever it may be, these students should have the same skills as every other student in Alberta, right? It doesn't matter where you go to school. It doesn't matter whether you go to a publicly funded public school, a publicly funded Catholic or separate school, a charter school, a private school – it shouldn't matter where you go – or a home-school in this case. It shouldn't matter where you go to school in this province. You should have the same level of understanding of all the prescribed topics.

4:10

In our government, when the NDP was in government, we commissioned and began a curriculum review and were reviewing many aspects of the curriculum, the entire curriculum, indeed. We know it was the first time in over two or three decades that a curriculum review had been done. Of course, the curriculum will always need updating and the curriculum will always need changes, but the point is, Madam Chair, that that curriculum, wherever it is in the process, wherever it is in the system, should be the same for every student.

Whether you are in Olds or you are in Edmonton, whether you are in Grande Prairie or you're in Fort McMurray, no matter where you are in this province, you should be learning the same things. You should be learning the same as your peers and your contemporaries, and you should be learning at, generally speaking, the same rate. You should be learning, generally speaking, the same topics, and when you learn about those topics, those should be prescribed and understood to have the same level of difficulty for every single student.

That's how it is in every single system across the province right now. Every student across this province right now, whether you are home-schooled or in a charter, private, or publicly funded school: no matter where you are in the province right now, those regulations, those standards, that curriculum is the same, right? Fundamentally every single student comes out at about 18 years old in Alberta, and they know all the same things and they have equal opportunity to go out and exceed in their workforce, if they enter the workforce directly, or at a postsecondary institution, whether that's trades, college, or university. Fundamentally everybody comes out on a fairly level playing field. That should be the intent of education. I think that when we talk about education and we talk about the education program, that fundamentally is what we should be trying to do. We should be trying to prepare every student in this province. We should be trying to prepare every single Albertan to have the best possible footing, the best possible chance to succeed.

I believe this amendment, the amendment that my colleague here has brought forward, would ensure that we continue that proud tradition – right? – would ensure that we continue that standard for every single student. Now, if we don't move forward with this amendment – and I would be quite disappointed if we didn't, Madam Chair – indeed, what would actually happen is that the Education minister is actually suggesting that some students don't need those same standards, some students shouldn't be held to the same regulations, and some students don't need to have the same

educational quality moving forward. That's not to say that these parents are not providing quality education. They absolutely are.

Certainly, in the current system, when they're tied to school jurisdictions, those school jurisdictions are able to help them provide the best possible education, whether that's providing materials or other things like assessments for learning outcomes. No matter where they are in the province right now, they have that equal opportunity. The government is actually suggesting with this bill – if they don't accept this amendment, then the government is actually suggesting with this bill that those students will not need to meet the same rigorous standards as everybody else, those students will not need to have the same quality of education as everybody else, and those students will not need to be as prepared for postsecondary or the workforce as every other student in the province.

I think that's pretty alarming. I think it's pretty alarming because we should be striving to make sure that every single student – no matter where you are in this province, every single child should have the best possible opportunity. We know that they are able to move forward with some of that right now. We know that they are able to have that right now. We know that, because of the way that our education system is set up, even when a parent decides that it is in the best interest of their child to home-school – and many parents across this province do, and they do it successfully, and those students go on and be very, very successful in their lives – even when that happens, those parents are supported. We know that they're supported because they have the opportunity to connect with their school jurisdiction, and there are a number of different school jurisdictions that are targeted to working with home-schooling parents, and those are able to provide targeted supports and direct supports.

I think that's exciting as well. We want that to continue, right? We want the system to continue and provide that high-quality level of education. We want the system to continue and provide the opportunity for these students to be at the same curriculum as everybody else because if we don't, Madam Chair, it places this sort of burden, it places this sort of unreasonable expectation that parents will be able to develop their own curriculum, in some cases, or omit parts of the curriculum and omit parts of the education that every other student is expected. I don't think that's fair to our students. I don't think it's fair to our children that we would omit certain parts of our education system because of a lack of attachment to a school jurisdiction, a school board.

I think, certainly, that home-schooling is a valuable way to teach your children. Again, I'll mention that I have some friends myself who have home-schooled their children or are home-schooling their children. It can be a valuable way, and it is a valuable way, to provide targeted supports and to provide a unique learning environment for some students who are unable to excel in a traditional classroom that you may see in a publicly funded school or a charter school. That's okay. It's okay to make that decision. It's okay, and parents should be making that decision if they think it's the best way for their students to learn and excel.

Instead, Madam Chair, what this government is actually trying to do is degrade that education – right? – degrade the quality of that education and actually say that these home-schooling children will not need the same standards as everybody else. I think it's pretty disappointing. I think it's pretty disappointing that the government is moving forward with this legislation. I hope they accept this amendment. I hope to hear from the Education minister and perhaps other members of the government caucus here as to what they think of this amendment and whether they agree that every single student should be on the same level, that every single student should be having the same educational quality, should be having the same

assessment, should be having the same standards applied to them, and whether they agree that we should be striving to ensure that every single student is able to graduate and go on and excel in their lives, whatever that may be, whether it's directly entering the workforce or a trade school or another postsecondary institution.

I'm looking forward to hearing from some of my colleagues in the government caucus. I'm looking forward to hearing from my opposition colleagues here, who I think will be speaking more as well. Certainly, as we move forward with this legislation, I hope that we'll be able to find some opportunities like this where amendments make sense – right? – where it makes sense to introduce amendments that make reasonable changes, that make changes that align the intent of the legislation with how we can actually provide the quality education for Albertans that allows students to actually continue to have a strong quality of education but have the choice that this government likes to talk about.

Indeed, we'll see where this government goes with it. I think it's pretty obvious that they introduced the legislation without considering this, without considering that we're actually degrading the quality of education for some students in the province, that we're degrading the standards of education for some students in the province. I'm pretty concerned with how well-thought-out this legislation is, and that's why our opposition caucus here is introducing these amendments, introducing amendments that I think will make a bad bill better.

Madam Chair, again, I think this is fundamentally a flawed bill. I don't know that there's enough that can be changed in this bill that would make it a good bill, but certainly I think there are some things that can be changed in this bill so that we will support students better than otherwise. We will have less opportunity to have students fall through the cracks. In these jurisdictions that are tied to home-schooling, we know that for parents who make the decision to home-school in many cases it's not a super onerous connection with the school jurisdiction or school board, right? It's not something that is super difficult for these parents.

In fact, in many cases, indeed, the school boards that are attached to home schooling are actually assisting the parents. They're doing things like providing material, providing workbooks, providing textbooks, and providing learning assessment tools for the parents. We know that not all parents are trained and that they don't have education degrees and all these things. That's okay. They absolutely are able to teach their children. That's a good thing. They're able to go out and have that quality education for their students. But if a school jurisdiction is able to attach to that home-schooled child, they're going to be able to help them and make that process easier, right? They're going to be able to go out and make sure that we have the protections in place to have the high standards of education for every student.

We know that the parents just want what is best for their child. They want to be able to provide the best possible education for their child, and that's why they've made that choice, right? That's why parents are making the choice to home-school their children. It's because they think that they can provide the best-quality education for their children. Indeed, if the school jurisdictions, the school boards that are attached to home-schooling parents are able to assist them in that matter, I don't see why this minister would introduce this bill and take away that protection, take away that stability, take away that baseline for every single student. I think it's pretty disappointing.

I'm pretty optimistic about this amendment. I think it's a good amendment. I think it certainly does help to ensure that the children across the province – it doesn't matter where you go to school, whether it's at home or in a publicly funded or charter or private school, or what your family chooses. I think certainly we're able to

have those protections. We're certainly able to have that quality of education, to have that curriculum provided and those materials provided, and I think that that's something that we should be pushing forward on and we should be optimistic about.

I hope to hear more from the Minister of Education. I hope to hear more from my government colleagues here, because we know that these children deserve the very best, and that's why these families are making these choices. They deserve the best. They deserve a unique learning environment that works for them. They deserve a learning environment that works for their family and may not be provided in different situations.

4:20

We know that these families really do have the best intentions, and we want to be able to support them in those intentions. I think this amendment does that. I think this amendment provides those services. This amendment provides that quality of care, provides that quality of education in a way that I don't know if the Education minister – I hope she speaks here in a bit – has really thought through. The Education minister, I'm concerned, hasn't considered the ramifications of detaching basically home-schooling from school jurisdictions, right? There are going to be adverse consequences. It will mean that some students have the opportunity to fall through the cracks and that some students will no longer have the supports that are provided by the school jurisdictions.

Our opposition caucus here is really trying to make this bad bill better. We're really trying to provide reasonable amendments that everybody can support, that make sense, that are common-sense amendments, aren't partisan talking points, aren't partisan attacks, Madam Chair. Indeed, this amendment is actually something that is simply saying that we think these parents should be supported. We think these parents should be attached to school jurisdictions. We think these parents should have that opportunity to continue to home-educate their children, to continue to provide that home-education quality while having a provision in place that the school jurisdiction will be able to provide them with the necessary quality of care in terms of things like materials, in terms of things like assessment, in terms of things like other supports. We think that's very fair.

It's a system that's currently in place. It's a system that thousands of Albertans who currently home-school their children use, so it's a system that we know has been working for a long period of time now. I believe it's been decades that the system has been in place, so it's a system that we know actually works, right? The minister is actually suggesting we go in – and perhaps the minister hasn't considered that changing the system, changing whether school jurisdictions should be tied to home-schooling children and home-schooling parents, will have adverse effects or not. We in the Official Opposition are particularly concerned that it will and can have adverse effects, that it will affect the education some students receive. It will affect their ability to do things like enter postsecondary or enter the workforce directly. I think that those are particularly concerning points.

I think that those are particularly concerning because the minister should have the goal that as many students as possible are able to enter postsecondary if they choose or are able to directly enter the workforce if they choose. That should be the goal of the minister. That should be the intent of the minister, to provide that highest quality of education for every single student, whether they attend home-schooling, whether they attend a private school or a charter school or a publicly funded institution like a public or Catholic school. No matter where they go in this province, they absolutely should have that same level of high standard because Alberta's education curriculum, Madam Chair, is one of the highest standards

in the entire world, right? We have had in the past some of the highest rankings in the entire world in terms of education and in terms of assessments. So when we look at this very high-quality education, we should be considering that every single student deserves to get the same high-quality education, that every single student deserves to have the support to receive that same high-quality education.

Again, we know that not every single student learns exactly the same way and that not every single student excels under exactly the same circumstances. That's why things like home-schooling are so important. That's why we support home-schooling and we support having these programs in place, but that's also why we support having school jurisdictions and school boards tied to these home-schoolers, right? These school boards and school jurisdictions are going to be able to provide additional supports to parents. We do not expect and we know that not every single parent that home-schools their child is going to be a teacher, educated in education, have an education degree or some sort of teaching certificate. We know that not every single parent that wants to home-school their child and provide that best opportunity, that best environment for their child is going to be a teacher, and that's okay. That's absolutely okay. It's actually beneficial for some of these students that they're able to have that unique family environment where they can learn from their parents or likewise.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The committee has under consideration amendment A5. Are there any other members? I see the hon. Minister of Education has risen.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. I just wanted to speak to this amendment, and thank you for bringing forward the amendment. I've listened with interest over the past while to various amendments. On this particular amendment I just want to bring several things to attention. I would hope that my colleagues would in fact vote this amendment down because it does not respect what we have heard from parents and from the home-schooling community, who have advocated long and hard for this particular option to be available to their families.

I need to clarify something because I think that the Member for Edmonton-South does not understand that currently in home-school programs, home-schoolers can choose programs that are not of the Alberta curriculum, and they can follow a different program of studies and do so successfully. Parents are ultimately in the best position to choose the education that they want for their children, and we respect that. I think that's the fundamental difference between the members on this side of the aisle and the members on the other side in the opposition, that we respect and trust that parents absolutely have the best interests of their children at heart. We recognize that in all education systems at times there are bad actors, and we deal with the bad actors. We actually have processes and regulations in place to deal with those situations where we have to intervene on behalf of the student.

In the case of this particular option that home-schoolers are looking for, in regulations we will have an ability to deal with that as well. We look forward to expanding on that. I just want you also to be very much aware that this nonfunded, unsupervised option that home-schooling parents are looking for, some, not all – we grant that the vast majority of home-schooling parents will absolutely follow the current home-schooling options that are available. But for those that want to choose this, I'd like to draw to your attention that in British Columbia and Ontario they already have these options in place and are running successful programs. Parents, you know, absolutely have that availability to choose the

type of education that they want, and if they choose this particular option, which parents in Ontario and B.C. have already done, in Alberta we trust that parents will make the right decision for their families and for their children.

This option also eliminates red tape in the sense that these individuals, these families do not want to be tied to a particular school division or a school authority. That is certainly within their right, but they do have to come to the department, my ministry, first and foremost to bring forward their plan, what they plan to do with their children. Again, parents – parents – the primary educators of their children, the people who know their children best, who know how their children learn best, are in the best position, and we respect that, to choose the type of education they want for their child.

Home educators: the Alberta Home Education Association is very supportive of this process. They have been advocating for it, and we are listening. As is indicated in Bill 15, we want to provide that option for those parents. We heard loud and clear from the over 50,000-plus respondents that responded to our survey that parents in Alberta value choice in education. We had over a million people vote for us, and one of the key platform commitments was choice in education. Again, this is something that is wanted and is being asked for by our parent communities, and we will honour it.

I guess that is everything I need to say on this particular amendment. Thank you for bringing forward the amendment. I would ask all of my fellow colleagues to vote it down.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, we have under consideration amendment A5. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in the House and speak to amendment A5 to Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020. There are a number of reasons we oppose and I personally oppose this bill. I don't really find a place that could change my mind to support the bill.

4:30

As this bill states, you know – I will say that the statement that interprets why this bill is being actually tabled in the House is that this is one on the UCP election platform. Second, the UCP actually claims that why they added it on to their platform and what this will serve to Albertans is that it will add to the preamble of the Education Act by recognizing section 26(3) of the universal declaration of human rights by the United Nations. This is something really, actually, puzzling for me, how you can address and achieve the universal declaration of human rights article 26(3) by jumping the very articles of 26(1) and (2). That is something obvious. It's not something suspicious – grounds for me to give the benefit of doubt on something. I see that this is something very ideological, a move of this government that is claimed in this bold statement that this bill is, you know, drafted around.

Some of the other things, then, that I will say. We say that the choice in education: we wanted to see this comparatively. Choice in education doesn't have to come at the cost of the public system. Choice in education can be protected without inserting ways to create a duplication in the system. The growth of private, of charter schools will only divert funds. We have reiterated this many times.

Some of the evidence as we are looking around is that Alberta is the only jurisdiction in the country that has charter schools and provides 20 per cent to 100 per cent more funding to private schools than other jurisdictions in Canada. If the UCP was serious about best practices and finding efficiencies, they would not be focusing

solely on holding the line or reducing funding. That's what we have seen in public education.

The Minister of Education said while she was in this House something I really wanted to mention. I don't know. I'm just going maybe a little off track. As I was a new member of this House in April and then the House started in May, many of the members in this House across both aisles were passionately speaking in their maiden speeches and their introductions. One thing that really, you know, resonated and stuck in my mind was that they were mentioning their communities and the social services, the education services, and the facilities and the deteriorating structures that have been historically defunded – right? – and I can see that the more we are moving in the political stripes and the House is more divided on political lines, those tones are not in the House anymore, but I will say that the reality has not changed since.

I can share my experience in my riding. My constituents coming to my office, the people that are coming to my office, booking appointments, a number of those people are asking – a case specific to my riding is that they wanted to know: when is the high school coming in the riding? I don't have the answers. I rose in the House many times and I put the question forward to the minister, and as of today I don't know. I would be happy to get the answer if there is any timeline within the period that I can assure my constituents by two years, by three years, by four years. What is the plan for the school? That is the very question I'm being asked in my riding.

Some of the other questions were coming forward. Parents came back to my office, and – I was not there yesterday – specifically they are anxious. Their children have special needs and they're calling, being affected due to changes to the PUF funding. I spoke with them over the phone. I'm going to meet with those families this Friday. They're bringing their experience, and they're worried, and they want me to make sure that their experiences, their problems are on the record. If I have a chance, I will bring that into the House. It will be my honour to do so on behalf of my constituents. Those are the kinds of issues that we are really hearing.

The government's own survey that they conducted did not really have complaints from the majority of the people. Part of that survey showed their satisfaction. They did not really show any kind of complaint that they're not happy with the current system. We have seen in these steps, in this House the promises that were made that the funding will be provided, but then we see the steps back.

I know my colleagues want to be on the record, so I won't take too long on this, but specifically to this amendment we are asking to strike section 5 and strike out section 11. Section 5 gives the ministry the ability to make and amend regulations regarding notifications and supervision requirements for home-schooling. It will risk the qualifications of the education received by children across the province.

It is not clear what the rights are, as I mentioned, that the government affirms, that the parents have primary responsibility for the education of their children. There is talk about article 26(3), but at the same time it's very important for us in the opposition to carefully review the act and provide constructive feedback to the government. When we know the government is not going to stop moving forward with Bill 15, what we're trying to do on behalf of our constituents and also other Albertans is anything we can do to make this bill stronger for them and transparent and accountable. That is what the amendment A5 to Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020, is proposing. That is the basic reason.

I was actually going to go to section 5 of this bill, but I will leave it. There are only five minutes more if my colleague wanted to be on the record.

That is the basic reason why this bill, in my view, if the government, the Minister of Education can't address these concerns, is a huge step in the wrong direction. By proposing this amendment, all we are trying to do is to add some mechanisms that we can feel and see were there. They're very important in this regulation.

That is the reason I encourage and I request all members of the House to support the amendment A5 to Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, we're on amendment A5. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020, specifically to amendment A5 this afternoon. We've heard several concerns about this piece of legislation, and specifically I think this amendment that we've proposed is something that could alleviate some of those concerns. I know that parents in the province absolutely have expressed choice in their education, and that's something that we certainly support. We've also heard that parents want a modern curriculum as well as no barriers to learning.

4:40

When it comes to having barriers in learning, I think that the proposal in Bill 15 that would eliminate the supervision for home-school parents is a concern. I know, personally, that my best friend is a home-schooling parent. She has five children who have all done different levels of education in the province of Alberta as well as outside of the province. They're a military family. They've experienced public school. They've experienced home-schooling. Whether it's been teacher-led, parent-led, she's got quite a vast experience when it comes to schooling and her children. She's also a teacher by education. She has worked in many different settings in the school system. She's worked alongside me in alternative programming. When it comes to children that are in care, she was parenting – sorry; she was teaching in that capacity those kids that had been kicked out of the regular school system, so working in a different stream. She's got quite an abundance of experience and knowledge when it comes to home-schooling.

You know, I've sat with her and discussed concerns about this piece of legislation when it comes to the choice in education. Something that she flagged right away was the supervision being removed for some parents when they're choosing to home-school. Now, it's a stressful process when you're looking at how to educate your children and how to determine what is their best course of action when it comes to the schooling system that you want for your children. It takes a lot of research and understanding just to pick a school. When a parent is choosing the home-school stream, there are also a lot of options that come into play with that. Sometimes parents have the best intentions when it comes to educating their children. However, sometimes parents don't necessarily make the best teachers when it comes to their children, and if we don't have checks and balances in place that are looking at the needs of those children, there's a concern there when it comes to having no supervision.

Now, the Minister of Education referred to bad apples and said that there are provisions in place or will be in place under regulations that will be monitoring what she referred to as bad apples. I just think: why would we create a problem when the way it is right now is fine? We have checks and balances in place. Supervision is required. When we send a child to school, their education is being monitored. We know that there are people that

are checking in on our children just to make sure that they're progressing in the way that they should be. If there are concerns in how they're learning, those things are flagged. Then those children can be eligible for additional supports in their education system.

Sometimes parents don't see that. They don't see the concerns that their child perhaps isn't developing at the same speed and the same rate and could benefit from assistance, whether it's some of the technology that's offered for parents that are doing home-schooling, some of the things that they might be eligible for that they didn't even know existed. They might not be able to identify that their child is struggling. There are professionals that work in our school system that can assist with that, that are trained to look for those concerns, whether it's a speech pathologist, whether it's a learning disability, whether it's something that is out there that they could benefit from. Sometimes a parent doesn't have that specialized understanding about how to identify what a special need is and how to identify what resources and supports are available. I think that if we had some supervision of that, that would be a way to intervene early with our children. We know that not all children learn at the same rate and the same speed, and some children need a little bit more assistance. Some children learn at an accelerated level, and they require more challenging education materials.

Having another set of eyes on those kids and those parents, I think, is a benefit. It assists in making sure that the children of our province have the absolute best education available to them, and it still allows parents to make a choice. It's not saying that you can't home-school. It's just saying that we think that there should be some supervision to make sure that everybody as a family is on track with the learning needs of their child. It's not a punishment by any means. It's a way to make sure that the kids are being supported, the parents are being supported in the absolute best way that they can.

Having worked in Children's Services, we know that some of the barriers that come to learning stem from the home environment. Unfortunately, there are home environments where children are not nurtured and supported in their education. It's a requirement of the law in the province that children participate in school, not kindergarten, and after the age of 16 it's no longer the law. But those children that are in that category of learning, between grade 1 and the age of 16, sometimes aren't being exposed to the best source of education because there is perhaps a lack of capacity from a parent to get that child to school. Perhaps there's some conflict within the home about the child attending school.

As a social worker with Children's Services I would respond to calls where schooling was identified as a protection concern. This child was not attending. The child was not participating. There weren't appropriate interactions with the school and the family. The school was concerned, whether it be the home-school organization that was monitoring the family. There were some safety concerns. So when we look at protection of children and the needs of the children and making sure that our focus, especially when it comes to choice in education, is child-focused, child-centred, the supervision of that certainly comes into play, making sure that the family has the capacity to ensure that this child's needs are met. Unfortunately, sometimes, not all the time, this happens.

I know so many families that choose home-schooling; that is the right fit for their family. Sometimes it's only one or two children. Maybe one or two go to school. They have children in different education streams. Some of them attend some of the specialized programs that the province has to offer, whether it's a sports academy or a religious academy. Each family makes decisions based on their children.

Unfortunately, there are some caregivers, parents that don't have the capacity to be able to meet their child's educational needs, and

that's okay, but we need to have that supervision in place to make sure that that child's needs are being met. As individuals in this Chamber – I don't want to create a loophole for some of those parents not intentionally choosing to not have supervision but for the parents that just simply aren't able to make those education systems effective for their children. They could benefit from some oversight. They could benefit from perhaps a different stream of the home-schooling. Maybe it's something that's more teacher-focused, that has a little bit more accountability in that setting. It's ultimately looking at the capacity of the parent and the caregiver to provide those educational needs to the child and what the child's needs are.

So when we propose this amendment, I think that reverting back to requiring supervision is something that makes sense. I would hope that the members in this Chamber would agree that we're trying to ensure that our children in the province of Alberta have the best possible education environment for their needs, not because parents intentionally are trying to withhold the appropriate education. That's certainly not the majority of the cases that I've seen as a Children's Services worker. It's just that the parents didn't have the capacity to actually be the educator in their family.

With supports and with monitoring I believe that a lot of those families could be successful. It just requires a little bit of support from the services that are already available, whether it's an aide, whether it's a teacher that's able to come in and help monitor and provide some guidance to those parents. Sometimes if you haven't done the home-schooling experience and you don't know and you're looking through what your options are, the word "supervision" for some parents might be off-putting, and not understanding what that means, they could inadvertently choose the nonsupervision without really understanding that that could be a detriment to their child's learning, not intentional but an unintended consequence, if you will, Madam Chair.

So I would really hope that we look at this. We're not trying to make it more onerous. We're not trying to make it difficult for parents to access this. It's just a simple solution that allows parents and children to be the most successful in their children's learning. I think that that's something that everybody in this House can agree on, that we want our children to be successful and educated and supported, and I would really hope that all members of this House seriously consider supporting this amendment, that makes sense.

Thank you.

4:50

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, we are on amendment A5. Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question on amendment A5 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, we're back on Bill 15. Are there any members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. If you don't succeed, you try and try again, of course. In our efforts to always make things better – right? – we have another amendment, that I would like to distribute now, please, to everybody. I'll keep one for myself.

The Acting Chair: If there are any members that would like a copy of the amendment, if you can raise your hand, one will be delivered

to you. Otherwise, they'll be on the tables at the side per the COVID rules. Just give us one second.

Mr. Eggen: Right.

The Acting Chair: Okay. This amendment will be known as A6.

If you'd like to read it into the record, hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Awesome. A6, lucky A6. I think we can give it a nickname, maybe, eh? I'm moving this on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. She is to move that Bill 15, Choice in Education Act, 2020, be amended by striking out the title, Choice in Education Act, 2020, and substituting "Education (Private and Charter Schools and Home Education) Amendment Act, 2020."

Yeah. I mean, I think that always it's like truth in advertising. We need to make sure that the public has an accurate idea of what legislation does, how it functions, and how it's named here in the Alberta Legislature. So the amendment moved by me on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I think, has a much more accurate sort of change of the title to better reflect the content of the legislation.

This amendment is important for people to understand that this bill is not encompassing all or indeed the vast majority of how education is delivered here in the province of Alberta but, rather, about 6 per cent of the delivery mechanism in the province of Alberta, which is the amount, approximately, of students that are in private and charter schools and are engaged in home education as well. These are all important choices, and these are all options that have been available to Albertans for quite a long time and indeed did receive the proportional increase in funding that all other forms of education did receive whilst we were the government here in the province. We know that people value those choices inherently.

Indeed, you know, I would suggest, Madam Chair, that we are at an important learning moment for all of us, with our schools being out because of the COVID emergency. We need to make sure that we are making investment, providing support and guidance, and ensuring standards for different forms of education as we move forward in the COVID-19 emergency situation that we're in, right? We have schools out now. It has been an unprecedented moment in time for all forms of school here in the province and indeed around the world, and I would venture to say, humbly but emphatically, that we need to make sure that we learn from that and build strong supports for all forms of education along the way as we move into an uncertain future.

I know that schools and school boards have done yeoman's work providing education while in-school attendance was not a possibility, but I also know that there's lots of room for improvement, too. This notion that school was out – right? – was a very false idea. In fact, school was very much in, and people were having to scramble and adapt to distance education for literally hundreds of thousands of students, so, you know, just in general I think we need to make sure that we learn from that and realize that we can't shortchange the flexibility that we need to build into all forms of education at this juncture.

Indeed, you know, again, I think the government had a confused response in regard to having to close schools and move to distance education, with their choice to lay off 20-some thousand education workers – right? – having the subtext somehow that school was out when, in fact, Madam Chair, school was very much in and in a new uncharted sort of area that I believe could have used more support considerably over these last few months. Students and parents and teachers worked really hard to try to ensure that there was learning taking place.

Again, I think we need to use our imagination and, above all else, our resources to make sure that we're going to be flexible moving forward, as I say, in an uncertain future for how school will be delivered here in the province of Alberta come fall, you know. That includes, I would venture to say, postsecondary as well. We know that postsecondary will largely be an online endeavour here, at least during the fall semester.

Again, I mean, hopefully, the government does not come to the temptation to make further cuts under the presumption that: oh, well, school is out and/or school is online, so we don't need to give as much resources to that enterprise. In fact, because of the newness of the situation and, you know, how people are trying to be creative to make up a new way to provide high-quality education, cutting positions, cutting funding is exactly the wrong way to go. That's just my own little subtext there on this.

Anyway, regardless, in regard to specifically this amendment, then, let's remind ourselves that about 94 per cent of our students and our families rely on high-quality public and Catholic education here in the province, which is one and the same thing. You know, we must make sure that we are funding and paying attention to that every step of the way as well.

I think that my hon. colleague's choice to change the title of this bill is more in keeping with the actual content of the bill. Certainly, it's important to reaffirm at every step of the way our commitment to choice in education around different forms, but just to remind all of us here in the Chamber and the general public, this bill specifically talks about changes to private, charter, and home education, amendments, so I would expect that the title change that we put forward here today would be something that everyone will support. I mean, that's just the vibe I'm getting in the room here right now. I can see that, you know, people are talking about it right now, and they're thinking: "Yeah. You know what? What a great idea." I think that that'll just carry us on in the spirit of co-operation for now and into the future.

I look forward to hearing other people's ideas on this, and I thank you for your time.

5:00

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, we have before us amendment A6. I see the hon. Minister of Education has risen.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. I just categorically disagree with this amendment. I find it problematic for many reasons, and I guess the first and foremost reason is that this is indeed a choice in education act. This is what we heard from parents. I think I'd like the members opposite to ask themselves why we are in the place we are in and to reflect on what has brought us here. What has brought us to this point is that during their tenure there were groups, including faith-based education, charter schools, independent schools, home-schoolers, and various public schools, that felt threatened. They didn't feel like they had choices, or their choices were being limited and it was a government-knows-best approach. Certainly, that is not something that our government supports.

We support that, absolutely, we have a long, successful history of choice in education, and it is because of those choices that I and my colleagues believe we have such a successful education, that's world renowned, because we are the only province in all of Canada that actually has and supports charter schools. We have options for parents. As the hon. member said earlier, if a family finds that a particular student isn't excelling or responsive in a particular stream, they can go to another stream. We support the various streams that are out there.

This bill, first and foremost, is about parents having prior right to choose the type of education that they want to provide for their children. First and foremost, parents are the primary educators. They have their children for the first number of years at home, and then they entrust their children to the education system, not the other way around. [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, please take your conversations to the lounges, and we'll hear the member that has the floor right now. That is the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you.

As a mother of seven I know that as I was looking to choose the education stream that I wanted for my children, having had them at home for X number of years, I was in the best position to know how they learned. I was in the best position to understand and love and really identify the needs that they needed to be addressed in the education system.

It's the parents, first and foremost, not a system, a bureaucratic system. As the Minister of Education, oftentimes things that cross my desk have little to do with the child and more to do with the bureaucracy of education. Let's get back to the fact that, yes, the majority of parents do choose the excellent public education that we have, which is public and Catholic and francophone. But there are other options for other reasons, and let's respect that. I think that's the biggest thing. Let's respect that parents, knowing their child so well, will choose what is best for their child.

This bill is very much about that, respecting. The very second piece is:

Whereas the Government of Alberta recognizes public schools, separate schools, Francophone schools, private schools, charter schools, early childhood services programs and home education programs as being valued and integral in providing choice in education to students and parents.

That's what this bill is all about.

Though the opposition chooses to focus on some minor amendments that we did with charter schools, where we are looking to streamline the process and add in vocational charter schools, which were implicit in the Education Act – and now we're just a little more explicit about it. We recognize that private independent schools are an important option. The reason we've put that in is because they were feeling that they weren't important under the previous government and were needing that reaffirmation. The option for home education, again, as I said earlier, was an option that the home-schoolers themselves want, and we will have regulations in place to ensure that if things are not being addressed properly, we can address them.

Again, this is all about choice in education. This was aptly named because this is what it's about. This is what we campaigned on. This is what we have said to the million-plus voters that voted for us, that we would bring forward choice in education. We respect choice, and I hope the members opposite will as well.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 15, looking specifically at amendment A6. As we know, the bill is called Choice in Education Act, 2020, and the amendment is us wanting to actually make the name more appropriate for the bill, which I certainly agree with, hence, changing it to Education (Private and Charter Schools and

Home Education) Amendment Act, 2020. I certainly support this amendment and will speak about it for the next little while.

You know, we do know that 94 per cent of Alberta students go to public schools, sort of regardless of what this UCP government is intent on doing, which is cutting the funding to public schools, which is what it has done, laid off thousands of teachers, and bringing in more of an American-style, privatized system. They're paving the way for this to grow even more by this legislation.

You know, only 6 per cent of students in Alberta are in home-schools, attend charter schools, or go to private schools. That's why we are suggesting that the name of this bill be changed, so we can clearly see what it's about. It's unnecessary legislation. Let's just face it. The vast, vast majority of Albertans are happy within the public system. That was even proven in their own survey, that the vast majority felt they had adequate choice within the public system.

Certainly, as a mom of three children I know this first-hand. I could just share a little bit just to really demonstrate how diverse our public system is. Certainly, it's not the system that I grew up in, in a little town in northern Alberta, but here in Edmonton my children had tremendous choice. My eldest son, when he was in grade 7, went to Victoria school of the performing arts, and he went there specifically because he was an artistic young man. He went, and he did all sorts of courses in development of videos. You know, I don't know. I don't even know what this stuff is called. That's why I would be a hopeless teacher for him at home, that's for sure. I wouldn't be able to do the home-schooling that he would have really thrived in. He actually has parlayed that now, as an adult, into his work, where he does all sorts of digital things. That whole world was demystified for him in grade 7, and this was right here within the Edmonton public school system. Of course, the Victoria school of performing arts has a vast array of different arts plus the academic work for children to be very successful. That's just one of my sons.

My middle son, when he was relatively young, in grade 3 or 4, showed a real interest in hockey, and he wanted to play hockey all the time. He had dreams of going to the NHL, as many young Alberta boys do. His father and I wanted to provide him with opportunity, so he went to Vimy – Vimy is the hockey school in the Edmonton public system – and from grade 7 he went to that school. Unfortunately, he never got drafted for the NHL, but he spent many, many hours playing hockey right in school. I used to think that it was incredible that this kind of an opportunity could be available to him. He was an honours student throughout his, you know, junior high, high school, plus he had this great opportunity to really develop his skills as a hockey player. That's also something totally different than my older son, but that is another choice.

My youngest son. Actually, my middle son and my younger son, up until about grade – well, it was different for us, but for most of the elementary years both went to McKernan, which was a French immersion program. They, you know, from kindergarten to about grade 4, took French immersion. That was a great opportunity for them right inside the public school system. Again, so much tremendous choice.

5:10

Unfortunately, one of the challenges that we experienced as a family is that my youngest son – you know, it was becoming clearer and clearer at first, when he was taking French, that he was not sort of keeping up with the other kids. His French teacher always told me: "It's okay. It's French. It takes them a little longer. Obviously, English is his mother tongue, and it's going to take some time." But in grade 4 I just knew that something had been done because he was starting to feel like he didn't understand anything. He told me:

Mom, I'm stupid; I can't do this. I was concerned, so I went and talked to his teacher. We had him assessed, and it turned out that he had learning disabilities in three areas.

The recommendation of the assessment was that he go to Academy at King Edward, which is a specialized program within the public school system with a very small number of students, like, 13 in a class, where they help kids overcome learning disabilities. My son, in grades 5 and 6, went to that school and received tremendous support that really helped him catch up, understand. He had the attention. They had aides in the classroom. It made a huge difference for his learning. You know, it was pretty disturbing because he felt that he was just dumb and he wasn't getting it; other kids could get it, and he didn't. Then after that two-year period he was able to be reintegrated into the public system, grade 7, and he was an honours student from grades 7 to 12. I mean, that's a huge success.

Already I'm showing you a tremendous amount of diversity, a tremendous amount of sort of starting where the child is at, supporting them in their interests, in their abilities. He, too, went to Vimy, and that was mostly because of his parents wanting some convenience so that two of the three would go to the one school. He took the outdoor pursuits program, which meant that they did, you know, work and going out in the bush and surviving and doing all sorts of things. Again, these are none of the opportunities that I could give him as a parent through sort of my own teaching of him.

I mean, I'm tremendously grateful to the public system and the diversity that they alone have offered my family. I know that I'm not alone in this and that many Albertans – and obviously we know that the vast majority are pleased with the options available in the public education system. So it sort of defies logic, really, that this bill is being brought forward. There are just tremendous concerns that it's just creating a lack of standards and that people aren't really going to be able to, you know, fulfill on giving children a world-class education.

We know that this bill, if we're talking about the charter schools, kind of sidesteps the local school boards because now people will be applying directly to the minister. And that's a problem. That's a significant problem because there is a public school board that is providing a vast array of choices, and now a sole person is responsible for that. I don't know. That sets up a red flag for me. I feel like that authority should not go to only the minister. That absolutely should be taken into consideration, the whole board system within that community. That's a serious concern with this legislation.

Also, with the home-schooling aspect that has, you know, the changes: I mean, these are already in place. We already know there are charter schools, we already know there's home-schooling, we already know there are private schools in Alberta, and it is that very small percentage, that 6 per cent of Albertans, that choose that. Fine. But the vast majority want the strong public education system, and diverting money away to these other systems is only going to erode high-quality public education. That's perhaps the very focus of this government. They do want to denigrate the public education system.

With this home-schooling that this legislation talks about, it says that parents would need to submit a plan for how they would educate their children but would not have to get approval of that plan from the government or be supervised by school boards. Unsupervised home education – and this is a quote – should be a concern to all Albertans. A child's right to a quality education must not be sacrificed in the name of parental choice.

If I can just go back to my son with learning disabilities, I mean, I was a parent who was involved, who wanted my kid to have the best education. He attended the public system, but we also did

extracurricular things. My boys took piano lessons, and we did piano where the parent was involved in the lessons, Music for Young Children, if anybody knows about that. My youngest son had significant challenges, as I've talked about, with learning.

I know that, myself, I'm not a trained teacher. I don't have expertise. I don't understand about learning disabilities. I mean, I know I'm not the only parent with a child with learning disabilities. We have to understand that there need to be significant supports for this. We can't just think that parents, you know, can be able to properly support their kids to have that world-class education. Like, I feel like, myself, I'm not even equipped to do that. I have a master's degree, but that doesn't mean that I'm qualified to be able to teach my kid and give him the world-class education that he deserves.

I mean, I just question this. How can this make any sense? Certainly, if we go back – I think about, you know, my own parents. I'm sure glad that they didn't home-school me because I feel like I would have missed out on so much, and I wouldn't have had the opportunity to really develop myself and go on to higher education. It's nothing against my parents. I love them dearly. But it's, like, not a simple thing to educate and teach people and certainly to be current, like I said about the digital videos and all that stuff. That's way beyond my comprehension, but that was so vital for my son, to be able to have that opportunity to learn that. There's no way that I could have offered him that.

I'd just like to reiterate also – you know, my colleague who spoke earlier had worked in child welfare, as I did years ago. I worked a lot with teachers and children who struggled in the school system. Oftentimes they struggled because they didn't have home environments that were strong, and there were challenges in those environments. Some parents do want to have control of exactly what their kids learn, but it may not be in that child's best interest, so there need to be checks and balances. There's just no question of that. Those are in place now, and this bill takes those away. That's really hurtful to the child.

We have to, I think, understand that if we're going to create this legislation, with its broad application to all students in Alberta, all parents in Alberta who want to home-school, then we need to, you know, understand that not everybody is going to have an enriched environment for them to be able to fulfill what needs to happen to properly educate children. There need to be checks and balances, so having them tethered, having them connected to school boards is so important to make sure that they have an understanding of what is needed in that.

I mean, it's just a myth that there isn't diversity already, that there isn't tremendous choice already in the public education system. There is tremendous – I think that I've demonstrated that by just my example of my three kids. It's – I don't know – mind-boggling, really, for me to think about why this is even needed.

But, you know, I think there may be a reason, and it is because this UCP government does want to increase private schools and erode the public system. I mean, they've already demonstrated that in the budget by cutting funding. Supporting more home-schooling, supporting more charter schools will only divert funds away from the public system more. I think that's what this bill is about, so we just want to call a spade a spade. Let's call it what it is and not pretend that it's something else because we already have choice in the system right now, and they want to create, you know, a way to divert away from the public system. It's a tragedy. You know why Education Alberta is world-class? It's because of our public system. It's because of the tremendous public system we have.

5:20

You know, I just really want to acknowledge all of the teachers. I know, especially during COVID-19, I mean, the work that they do

to reach out to their students and support them – I know many parents I've spoken to are looking forward to those days when those kids can go back to school because they realize how difficult it is and how having a professional care for their children, educate them is so vital to their well-being. I think parents are kind of humbled by the situation.

You know, to be frank, I feel grateful that my children are older because I know that it would have been super challenging for me, especially because I wasn't an expert in learning disabilities and how to really support my son. Certainly, I really am so grateful to those teachers at Academy at King Edward who made all of the difference for my son, and that was right in the public education system, and there were just tremendous opportunities for all of my children. I'm so grateful for that.

I'll just say again that, like, 94 per cent of Albertans go to the public system. Just a very small percentage of Albertans choose something else. You know, those systems are already in place. This just sort of paves the way for more private education, which is only going to, you know, erode our very important public system. I certainly would support that this bill be called what it really is, and I would recommend that all of the members in this Chamber do vote in favour of the amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I've been keeping pretty quiet here and listening to lots of debate through the multitudes of amendments that the opposition has brought forward. I would like to – I don't often do this – call out a thank you to one of the members opposite. I don't want to get it wrong here. I want to say Edmonton-Mill Woods. I hope it's Edmonton-Mill Woods. I actually enjoyed her dialogue. She brought forth some really good . . . [interjection] It is Edmonton-Mill Woods? I can't thank you because I don't thank you. I thank this lady back here. I'm just trying to make sure that I got the right lady.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I believe it's Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Getson: Edmonton-Castle Downs. Yeah. Perfect. Thank you for correcting me.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs had the most compelling reasons for a couple of points that she brought up. She was actually concerned about, you know, the concerns of the children, being from her former background. I always like it when the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs speaks because I enjoy her debate. I honestly do. She brings a level of decorum to the opposition that I think they should start to emulate because that individual from Edmonton-Castle Downs I know I could sit down and have a grown-up conversation with.

The Acting Chair: I'm just going to remind all members that we are on amendment A6.

Mr. Getson: Yes, ma'am.

The Acting Chair: Keep your comments pertinent to the amendment, although I'm sure the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is very flattered by the compliments from the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, ma'am.

The Acting Chair: We'll go back onto the amendment A6.

Mr. Getson: The segue into that, ma'am, is calling things for what they are. This amendment here is actually trying to point out, in the opinion of members opposite's opinion, what we're doing. Instead of being a Choice in Education Act that we're putting forward by our hon. Minister of Education, they want to say it's called the Education (Private and Charter Schools and Home Education) Amendment Act. Again, with the exception of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs the entire opposition that I've heard speak so far has missed the entire point of the entire bill, which, you would think that by law of percentages they would get 'er, but, again, we're not quite there.

Coming back to the choice in education, there are lots of choices out there. All school divisions are not created equal either. I've heard the members opposite talk about how good, how fantastic every single school division is, and I can tell you that is not the truth. They are not created equal. You can look at what happened down in Calgary. That school division is not equal, not equal at all compared to the choices in education, how they spend their cash, and what they do. But you know what is equal? The right for every Albertan parent to choose for their education of their children. That is something that's fundamentally equal.

As one member had put it, to go to McDonald's to see if you can open up a Wendy's franchise: they probably wouldn't let you do it. Let's talk about toppings. Let's talk about hamburgers because everybody loves a good hamburger. I want choices in my hamburger, Madam Chair. I don't want to have to go to Wendy's to buy my McDonald's Big Mac. I want my choices. When it comes to my kids, I've got the choice for my kids. What COVID has taught us is that a lot of the teaching is not created equal.

What is interesting is that maybe we should have put – I don't know. Maybe I have an amendment for the amendment, Madam Chair, because really what this is coming down to is that if we want to put words in here – maybe I'll offer my own amendment to the amendment on this – what they should call it is Alberta School Changes Will Produce Nutbar Right-Wing Warriors. Why don't we call it for what it is? This is where they believe that this should be at. They honestly believe that with us giving choices in this act, we should maybe call it the Right-Wing Nutbar Act. It's pretty disingenuous. If you want to start calling things names, let's get to the root of your debate, with the exception of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

The Acting Chair: Let's remind ourselves that we're going to speak through the chair to all members.

Mr. Getson: Sorry, ma'am.

This one is a passionate one because, again, I have four kids at home. I went to public education. So did my wife. My wife is a doctor in dentistry. I became a civil engineering technologist. The Yellowhead school division that I went to was very much recessed. We only had small classroom sizes. There were only 30 of us. We had to beg, borrow, and steal to get physics equipment. Now, when I become an MLA and I go back to my old area where I grew up, I look at Grand Trunk Yellowhead. They have turned that thing absolutely around. They have their budgets under control. Kids' test scores are going up. It's fantastic.

What I get from my constituents out in my area: they want the choice. They want the ability to choose. If they want to choose to educate their children in that school division, fantastic. Not all of them are created equal. My kids go to Parkland. Not every school is equal in Parkland. My wife now, who's, you know, the nutbar, a doctor in dentistry, is choosing to keep our three kids at home. The fourth is still going to carry on with high school, and in all likelihood my daughters will go back to high school when it's

available. What she's being told by the administrators is that if you leave that system, you can never come back in. It's come to my attention that some of the teachers' unions are propagating this type of information, this misinformation, Madam Chair.

When we're talking about calling things what they are, maybe we should start putting those facts on the table and stop – I'm trying to use the right word – light-footing around the actual meaning and the dialogue and the concerns they have. At the doors that's what we heard time and time again: let me have the right to choose. They have brought up issues before, again, not to the amendment in this one, Madam Chair, but they brought up issues before about protecting one's children and having that line of sight.

I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-West. He brought Clare's law into effect. We still keep forgetting about that. That is relevant for everyone, to keep an eye on the kids.

Again, this changing the name, I'm not comfortable with it because that's not the intent. A rose by any other name is still a rose. I'd like to thank the rose, for you, Madam Chair, for bringing forward this act that's going to allow my family, my choice, that I can educate my children the way I can, and my constituents because that's what they asked for time and time again.

The former Minister of Education, if he's talking about names, maybe he could have chosen the Hunt to Kill and Bankrupt Private and Charter Schools. That was his former standpoint on the Education Act from what I'd seen out in my area. It was a meticulous effort to drive them under and holding a bag of gold.

What's in a name? Just about everything. Let's call it for what it is. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Well, that was certainly a spirited debate on amendment A6.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to rise and join debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not going to take much time. I'm going to speak to this amendment quickly, not using my own words but actually using the words of some people that I represent as the MLA for St. Albert. I am quite certain that the majority of us have school boards in the areas that we represent. As you know, it is our job to consult with them and to listen to their feedback. Because they don't have a voice in this place, I'd like to share with you some of their concerns as they relate to Bill 15 directly. I will table a copy of their letter tomorrow.

They have three distinct concerns, one of which speaks directly to the actual amendment to change the title of the bill. The three concerns are: one, the impetus for Bill 15; two, the potential consequences of Bill 15; and three, the actual consultation process that was undertaken.

5:30

I want to read a section that I think is really important. The government of Alberta actually does have a very long history of supporting school choice, and I think that we can probably all agree on that. Certainly, with Bill 19, the School Amendment Act, which first introduced charter schools – I don't know if you remember that – after several additional policy changes we saw Alberta's education system expand and change on an unprecedented scale. Alberta has been argued to have an extremely accommodating stance towards school choice, as evidenced by the development of alternative school funding in the '70s. Acceptance of private schools in the revised School Act of 1988 went a little further to expand choice. Actually, Alberta has been described as offering the greatest degree of school choice in Canada. School choice is embedded in the fabric of the education system in Alberta.

There is simply no existential threat to school choice in Alberta. This comes from a school board.

Mr. Yao: Look in the mirror.

Ms Renaud: Well, I could look in the mirror, but I'm pretty sure I wouldn't see a school board. Thank you for that.

Furthermore, based on market principles there is no evidence of an increased demand for more charter schools. What's really important to note, Madam Chair, is that the cap for charter schools was never reached, nor was there a backlog of charter school applications waiting to be processed at the provincial level. To reiterate the original question, which goes back to supporting this amendment: what is the impetus for choice in education, and what is the impetus for naming this piece of legislation that way?

I think that the two school boards in the area that I represent, who I've spoken with, were very clear and actually very proud of the fact that they had a great deal of choice. From Logos, to sports academies, to recreation academies, to inclusive education, to francophone opportunities, to immersion opportunities: all kinds of choice opportunities in the Catholic and in the public. I think that I can't speak for all the school boards, but I imagine choice is something that is represented in most school boards.

What I heard from these groups was that having this labelled or called choice in education failed to really recognize the decades – and this isn't the last four years of an NDP government. I'm talking about decades of the evolution of educational opportunities in Alberta. I think that the letter, that, again, I will table tomorrow, goes a long way to explain that history of how we got here, how we got to private schools the way they are, how we got to charter schools, how we got to the number 15 before the cap was removed. What was the difference between charter and private? How did they work together with public and Catholic? How did that work together with people that choose home-schooling? How were they best supported throughout Alberta?

There is a very rich history of choice. You can't deny that. You may not like the choices in your area, and they may not fit with your personal view of what should be available to you, but you have to admit that there is a great deal of choice in education in Alberta. Those are facts. Our amendment is about changing the title of the bill to reflect the state of our province right now. That's it.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members? I see the Member for Calgary-South East has risen to join debate on amendment A6.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. Parents are the ultimate caregivers and educators of their children. Bill 15 protects Alberta's long history of education choice, including public and separate schools, francophone schools, charter, independent schools, early childhood education, home education, and a variety of alternative programs. Real choice in education exists when parents can choose educational settings that meet the needs of their children as well as their family values and culture.

Schools, then, must have the freedom to provide an environment that meets the expectations of those parents. A parent's freedom to exercise their right as the ultimate educator is threatened when laws, policies, and practices reduce or eliminate the existence of educational options. This can include threatening to remove the accreditation or funding from independent schools, regulations limiting the number of charter schools, or school board trustees limiting the expansion of alternative programs counter to the wishes and demands of parents.

Albertans have embraced school choice and have rejected a one-size-fits-all institution. They have done so because our students, our children are not one size fits all. Children have a wide range of needs and interests, so why wouldn't our educational institutions reflect that diversity? Some parents have chosen independent schools, charter schools, or home education because they believed that it would be a better academic fit. For others their decision is motivated by culture, values, religious beliefs, sports, or music.

Tailoring education to the student can improve school attendance and engagement and, as a result, improve their academic results. Choice doesn't just improve the experience and academic outcomes of students. It also drives our educational institutions to innovate, to implement best practices, and to strive for continuous improvement.

Choice also facilitates parental autonomy and enables a parent to make changes if an education setting is not meeting the needs of their child. With home-schooling and independent schooling funding well below public, choice in education also saves the government hundreds of millions of dollars, all while reducing class sizes in our public schools and often providing superior educational outcomes.

I support strong, accessible, publicly funded education. I also support school choice. You can have both, and indeed in Alberta we do. I have families in my constituency that send one child to public and one to independent. I've met families that at times have home-schooled and other times have put their children in public or separate.

While some push fear and misinformation, record funding of over \$8 billion speaks to our government's commitment to strong, accessible, publicly funded education. The five public schools in various stages of construction in my constituency also speak to that commitment.

I would like to thank the minister for bringing forward this bill, which I believe is appropriately named, for fulfilling this important campaign commitment, for solidifying parents as the ultimate educators of our children, and for protecting school choice.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on the main bill. I see the Minister of Energy has risen.

Mrs. Savage: I rise to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 15.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Bill 16

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

The Acting Chair: Do we have any speakers wishing to speak to Bill 16? I see the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen to speak.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to move an amendment to this bill. As that comes up, I'll begin to read it. It's fairly extensive, so I can begin to read it into the record. I move that Bill 16, Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020, be amended as follows: (a) in section 10 in the proposed section 12, in subsection (1)(b)(ii) by adding "except as provided in 12.2(3)" immediately before "the offence was not reported to a

police service”, and in subsection (2) by renumbering clause (a) as clause (a.1) and adding the following immediately before clause (a.1):

(a) a financial benefit applied for by a victim in accordance with the regulations;

(b) in section 11 by striking out the proposed section 12.2 and substituting the following:

Application for Benefits

12.2(1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3) an application be made under section 12

(a) only in respect of a financial benefit referred to in section 12(2)(a) or a supplemental benefit referred to in 12(2)(b), and

(b) only if the offence was reported to a police service within a reasonable period of time after the offence occurred.

(2) Except as provided in subsection (3) and section 12.4, the application must be made within 2 years after the date on which the applicant first knew or in the circumstances ought to have known that the offence occurred.

(3) If the victim was a minor at the time the offence occurred, an application under section 12 must be made within a reasonable period of time after the date the victim becomes an adult;

(c) by striking out section 12 and substituting the following:

12 Section 12.4 is amended by striking out “Notwithstanding sections 12.2(2)(b) and 12.3” and substituting “Despite sections 12.2(2) and (3) and section 12.3(2)”;

(d) by striking out 13(a) and substituting the following:

(a) in subsection (1) by striking out “On receipt of an application for financial benefits” and substituting “On receipt of an application under section 12.2 in respect of financial benefits or a supplemental benefit;”

(e) in section 14 in the proposed section 13.1 in subsection (2)(c) by adding “or to determine the amount of that benefit” immediately after “whether a person is eligible for benefit under this Act”; in subsection (3) by adding “or to determine the amount of the benefit” immediately after “whether a person is eligible for benefit under this Act”; (f) in 21(b) in the proposed section 17(i), by striking out “supplemental” wherever it occurs.

5:40

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

The amendment as introduced by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View will be referred to as amendment A2. You may proceed in your discussion.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. That was a long series of things I just read out. Essentially, the amendment aims to do two things. The first is to restore financial benefits to victims. Presently under the act all financial benefits are lost with the exception of the four things outlined. Two of them relate to members of the class in the class-action lawsuit which the government settled. That lawsuit was brought on behalf of children in care for whom the government had not applied for financial benefits. Two of the subsections relate to that. One of the subsections relates to the old act from 1997, and the other subsection relates to severe neurological damage.

In the absence of one of those four things, no financial benefits are available under Bill 16, so that’s a big concern for me. This will restore the ability of a victim to apply to the financial benefits program. This is needed because the current Bill 16 takes it away. This amendment will help to ensure that if a victim of crime sort of undergoes major psychological trauma or has time off work, they have access to funds to assist with that, which is often the case.

In addition, the other change that this makes has to do with pausing the limitations period. It’s the case under the current Victims of Crime Act and under the proposed Bill 16 that you have

to come forward within a reasonable period of time, and there are some variations to that. It sort of operates a bit like the civil limitations period, although there’s not a perfect analogy there.

One of the things the old Victims of Crime Act did that Bill 16 gets rid of is that it allowed a child witness who had witnessed a crime – it basically paused that limitation period while the child was a child. We actually see this as well in the civil limitations period and for good reason. Often when a child has experienced trauma, they’re not in the best position to come forward immediately, so the idea is to pause that until they’re 18 and then let the sort of reasonable time period start running. I think that’s really important. This would actually apply that to everything, so if you were a child victim of any sort, the limitations period would be paused. I think those two things are absolutely critical.

One of the things I want to do here is read into the record a message that I received from someone who had accessed this fund. She writes: “Two years ago I left my spouse because he assaulted me. I left with the clothes on my back. I managed to scrape together some of my children’s belongings that were important to them, and I ran with what little strength I had.” It was going on: “For two years I battled my abuser in court, facing my abuser, reliving the trauma he imposed on me, having to relocate homes multiple times, all while trying to protect my children, trying to keep us safe, trying to keep us hidden and be lucky enough not to be found by my abuser. The emotional, mental, and physical draining it takes on a victim to continuously see their abuser over and over in court proceedings, listening to their abuser lie or twist their version of what they think happened, listening to excuses thrown out by their abuser for this behaviour, scarring not only myself but three young children, is exhausting. At one point in time I considered ending my life because I thought it would be easier than continuing to battle this person in court every two weeks. I have not been able to go back to work. I have not healed after a long hospital stint.” She details some of the injuries that she sustained.

She goes on to list: “I could not stop crying. I felt ashamed, guilty, heartbroken. I had times of grief. Even today I can’t sleep, and I have multiple health issues stemming from the stress. My children have also suffered. The victims’ services fund helped us to take the time we needed to go to court, to keep us safe, not to stress over financial obligations because most of us were financially restrained by our abusers, so we ran with nothing. The victims’ services fund helps to fund housing, food, clothing, counselling, a lawyer. And taking the time away or decreasing the amount given to a victim impacts their entire life and how they live while trying to manage moving forward with their lives. This fund is needed by victims to ease their minds of one less thing they have to worry over, to stress over, to have anxiety over, to consider suicide over. Please consider using this at the Leg.”

And she goes on to detail the reasons why she’s very concerned about the bill. I think that we need to understand what we’re talking about when we’re talking about these financial benefits, because they really are things that impact people at the most difficult moments of their lives.

I’d also like to read from a letter that I received, and this letter is sent on behalf of multiple organizations: the Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Organization, the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, Stop Abuse in Families Society, Alberta Restorative Justice Association, and Assist Community Services Centre. They detailed the history of the fund and a number of other things, but I think that one of the critically important things that they say is:

Victims play a critical role in the criminal justice system. Our organizations support victims [to] ensure they receive help, support and rights to which they are entitled, and which are

entrenched in both provincial and federal legislation. In the course of our work in supporting and meeting the unique needs of victims, we have built a broad base of knowledge when it comes to the challenges victims face and the impacts on victims when they don't receive timely and appropriate services. Without this critical support throughout the process, many victims choose not to engage [in] the criminal justice system or exit the process before resolution, resulting in offenders not being held accountable and endangering the safety of our communities.

It goes on to detail several reasons why holding offenders accountable helps to ensure public safety and helps to support victims. In addition, the letter references the work the Auditor General requested that we do and the fact that the outcomes of that work identified that there were gaps in service that needed additional funding, funding which was intended to be forthcoming.

In addition, Mr. Chair, I have a letter here from Mothers Against Drunk Driving detailing their considerable concerns with Bill 16. They say in part:

We do not believe [the] Victims of Crime Fund should be used to fund more Crown or law enforcement efforts. Any changes should [be to] enhance services [and] provide more holistic services to more victims and survivors of crime. Crown and police act on behalf of the public, not on behalf of [victims and survivors], their budget should be paid by taxpayers given the only funding for victim services is through the Victims . . . Fund.

At MADD Canada, we recognize the needs of victims and survivors go beyond the criminal justice system. In many cases, the justice system is not even available to them and often is a source of frustration and re-victimization. The parent of a young person who was killed while driving impaired will not be engaged in the justice system but will be in urgent need of support. Some impaired drivers may flee the scene to avoid apprehension and prosecution. The needs of the victims and survivors in these cases are no less important because those cases are not going through the justice system.

5:50

What these folks are expressing are concerns. In particular, MADD is expressing a concern about the need for more support for victims, and they're detailing, you know, instances in which a victim who has suffered a very real crime may not be identified by the system as a victim because prosecution isn't possible for whatever reason. This, unfortunately, happens in our justice system, and it is incredibly tragic for those families and for those victims.

Mr. Chair, the incredible importance to me of these amendments is that a lot of victims need a lot of support. I think, in fact, there were a number of ways that the regulations, which I've been over extensively, could have actually been amended to allow more victims to apply to the fund and ought to have been so amended. I wish very much that we had been able to bring that forward. You

know, we had finished the work the Auditor General asked for, and we were hoping to make further changes to ensure more funds were flowing to victims and to the organizations that support them. I think that's incredibly important. I can tell you that in doing that work, we did do what the Auditor General asked. We did look at the needs of victims and at the gaps in service, and the gaps in some cases were significant. Certainly, this program could have used some work, but this is not a step in the right direction. This is a step in the wrong direction.

This amendment proposes to fix both something that I think Bill 16 is doing wrong and something that I believe is incorrect in the current act, which is to say that the pausing of the limitation period only applies to a child who has witnessed a crime and not a child who themselves was a victim of a crime. I guess it proposes to fix, to make better this current bill but also what has gone on in the past. You know, as we move forward with this bill, I would really like my colleagues to consider and to reflect on the importance of that financial benefits program. It's not a lot of money that each individual gets, but it's often life-changing for those individuals.

I think I would urge everyone to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mrs. Savage: Looking at the time, five minutes to 6, I rise to move that the committee rise and report progress on both Bill 15 and Bill 16.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Getson: The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 15 and Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the report, all those in favour, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed? That's carried.

Mrs. Savage: I rise to move that the Assembly adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]

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