



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 21, 2021

Day 101

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
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Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 62

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 1

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Sigurdson, R.J.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

[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.

Members' Statements

Queen Elizabeth II

Ms Goodridge: Today, April 21, 2021, is a truly special day for us in the Commonwealth. On this day 95 years ago Her Majesty the Queen was born in Mayfair, London, the first child of the then Duke and Duchess of York, who later became King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Since becoming head of the Commonwealth and Queen regnant of seven independent Commonwealth countries, Her Majesty has celebrated 69 birthdays as queen, all of which have varied in their celebration. One of Her Majesty's more famous celebrations took place in 1963, celebrating her 37th birthday, where the Queen famously danced the twist at the ball at Windsor Castle and closed the party down at 3 a.m.

But this year her birthday will not be a day of royal rejoicing. She is instead in a period of royal mourning following the recent passing of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. Her Majesty has announced that she has no plans to celebrate this year. For the second year in a row no guns will salute her at Hyde Park or the Tower of London. In the enduring spirit of Her Majesty, the longest lived and longest reigning British monarch, the longest serving female head of state in world history, the oldest and longest serving current head of state, I trust that we will have a fitting celebration for her when the time comes next year. Our hearts go out to Her Majesty in this time of celebration overshadowed by mourning.

I would like to close with the reading of the last verse of *God Save the Queen*. "Thy choicest gifts in store, on her be pleased to pour; . . . may she defend our laws, and ever give us cause to sing with heart and voice God save the Queen."

The Speaker: Long may she reign.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

School Closures and COVID-19 Response

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Education was in this House bragging about her efforts to keep schools open and students safe. Well, just hours after she was patting herself on the back, families in my constituency learned that their children's schools are being closed. Edmonton public and Catholic school boards are joining multiple other school divisions in moving their grades 7 to 12 online for a second time in the school year. Again these families are thrown into turmoil, not sure how they will handle the next few weeks with work and now their kids, who will be staying at home.

We have proposed countless reasonable measures that would reduce the chance of spread of COVID-19 and keep our schools

staffed and open, including a cap of 15 students per classroom and additional funding for more staff. The minister ignored it. We also know that there were numerous schools and school boards telling the minister her plan is insufficient and that they want proper supports in place to keep our students safe and our schools open. She ignored them. Now my constituents and families across the province are paying the price for the minister's failure. Today we made a new call to address the staffing issues in our schools and give our schools a chance to make it through the rest of the year by using the COVID contingency fund outlined in Budget 2021 to hire graduating teachers from postsecondary to staff up our schools and spread out our classes to prevent further closures.

It is critical to keep our schools open. I hope that the minister and Premier start listening and take some action. We need students in school. We need them safe when they're there. We need this government to actually lead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Parliamentary Debate and Political Discourse

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are becoming more and more divided every day. The politics of hyperpartisanship, anger, personal attacks are only seeking to serve and drive that wedge further. You are threatened with being cancelled simply because you hold a perspective challenging that of the dominant narrative of the day. Somehow in this polarized climate we have gone from critiquing policy and ideas to impugning the character of those who hold a different perspective than us. There is a malevolent belief that people from the opposite side of the political spectrum are somehow inherently bad. We need to encourage everyone, regardless of where they sit on the political spectrum, that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

We learned as children that sticks and stones may break bones but that words would never hurt, but that old nursery rhyme isn't as true as we'd like to believe, Mr. Speaker. Some people fear talking about the very political issues that affect everyday lives because they worry about how their friends will react. That doesn't mean that we should avoid talking about important issues that impact our society. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

Part of the problem is that our parents and grandparents have raised generations to believe that it's not polite to talk about politics. Well, I think it's high time that we lead by example and speak to each other as though we all share a common goal, because I think we do. We are all here because we want to leave Alberta better than when we found it. We want to see Alberta succeed; we just have a different way of getting there. We agree on more things than we don't, and I think we all owe it to Albertans to do better, myself included.

It's our job as MLAs to show leadership and do our best to unite Alberta. This is now more important than it ever has been because over the past year the province that we all love has been through adversity like we've never seen before. So let's raise the bar. Let's talk to our neighbours, engage in debates that make us uncomfortable, and let's endeavour to understand.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Coal Development Policies

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year, behind Albertans' backs, consulting no one but foreign coal companies, this government rescinded Peter Lougheed's coal policy and began auctioning off our mountains to the highest bidder. Ever since then

Albertans have been expressing their disgust at the UCP's plans. They're disgusted because when this government looks at the eastern slopes, they don't see natural beauty. They don't see essential river water. What they see is something to be smashed up and hauled off for profit.

The UCP government thought they could get away with it, but after enormous outcry from First Nations, ranchers, farmers, municipalities, and Albertans, they were forced to pull a U-turn and set up what they call a consultation. Here's the tragic thing, Mr. Speaker. We know Albertans are disturbed by the possibility of permanent damage to the mountains. We know Albertans are afraid of toxic levels of contaminants such as selenium entering our water supply, but they will not be able to speak about either of those issues.

The UCP couldn't get away without a consultation, so they set up a phony consultation instead. Mr. Speaker, Albertans aren't fooled. Local landowner Kevin Van Tighem said that Albertans are being consulted on, quote: everything but what we want to talk about. Bobbi Lambright, director of the Livingstone Landowners Group, said, quote: I have never in all my years seen a government that works so hard to do the wrong thing.

Mr. Speaker, this so-called consultation is an exercise in misdirection, designed to reach a predetermined outcome on the basis of an artificially restricted set of facts. If this government cared about the Rockies, they would work with us to pass the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. Unfortunately, earlier this week they voted against even debating it.

The truth is if the UCP hadn't got caught, they would be moving ahead with strip-mining our mountains as we speak. With this fake consultation they might even take the long way around, but their ultimate goal is the same.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Racism Prevention

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a disturbing rise in hate-filled violence in Edmonton over the past few months. This hateful and racist violence has been largely directed at black Muslim Canadians but has also increased against indigenous and Chinese Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, hate of any form is simply unacceptable, and this violent, racist hate has no place in any free, open, or democratic society. As chair of the UCP's capital region caucus and a long-time resident of the Edmonton metro area, I am deeply disturbed by this trend in Edmonton, and I know that many Albertans are. These racist attacks are horrific and have a strong negative impact on marginalized communities within our province.

1:40

At a time when many of us are feeling isolated and lonely, these racist attacks substantially add to these feelings for marginalized groups. I could not imagine just sitting in a car in a mall parking lot, minding my own business, and having a random man come up yelling racist taunts and then breaking my car window. This attack happened last December to two Somali Canadians, and one was forced to run from the vehicle only to be assaulted until bystanders stepped in. That is not the Canada that I know. That is not what is guaranteed for our residents through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

A lot of work has been done by our government to deal with racism and help marginalized communities. The government continues to modernize the Police Act to better ensure equality before the law. We have passed the Fair Registration Practices Act and have included substantive black history in the new curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also proud to see how young people in our communities have stepped up and advocated against racism. Over the past year there have been many students and passionate residents that have come together in my riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain to peacefully protest racism and hate. Racial injustice affects us all, and in the spirit and action of my constituents and others we all have to do our part to eventually end the scourge of racism.

Thank you.

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

Rural Issues

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP claim to be champions for rural Alberta. That is what they say, but their actions tell another story. The UCP continues to take rural Alberta for granted and is not doing what is needed to ensure that rural parts of the province and the agricultural sector are drivers in our economic recovery.

Let me begin with coal. The UCP were interested in courting investments from Australian billionaires to mine the eastern slopes, but they continue to completely ignore ranchers and farmers who are concerned with the impact of mining on land and water. The UCP's fake consultation doesn't even allow land and water to be within the scope of the consultation. This is completely insulting to farmers and ranchers who have been working on this land for generations. They deserve a voice at the table.

Farmers also want the UCP to echo their calls in AgriStability negotiations with the federal government. The program does need reform and overhaul, but the federal proposal only goes till 2023. The UCP refuse to provide a few million to get one and a half times that back from the federal government. How does the UCP justify spending \$30 million a year on the failed energy war room but can't spend under \$10 million to provide more stability for Alberta's agricultural sector? Are they really trying to save money on the backs of farmers?

There is such economic potential in rural Alberta in agriculture. We see diversification of this sector happening across the world and across other prairie provinces, yet we see a government who has stalled on supporting the sector to grow and expand. From plant proteins to biofuel and local food hubs, investors are waiting to see this government's signal that Alberta is the place to invest. The UCP campaigned in the last election, claiming that voting for them would lead to economic prosperity. Unfortunately, we have seen the opposite. The UCP sold their corporate giveaway as a policy that would generate economic activity, but helping foreign shareholders increase their dividends while jobs are lost at home does nothing for economic development.

Rural Alberta and the agricultural sectors have much to offer in Alberta's economic recovery. Alberta deserves a government that will invest in them. This government needs to stop taking rural Alberta for granted.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Federal Budget 2021

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, April 19 the federal government introduced their first budget in two years and their first budget since being elected in 2019. Now, after introducing this dumpster fire of a budget, we understand why they wanted to delay it for so long. Prime Minister Trudeau's Liberal government introduced an economically devastating budget, which has over \$354 billion in deficit this fiscal year and \$154 billion in the next

fiscal year. This deficit will burden us, our children, and our children's children with debt.

The hope was that the federal government would introduce a fiscal anchor to return us to the prepandemic net debt-to-GDP ratio of around 30 per cent, but according to the federal government's projections we won't see that until 2055, over 30 years from now. We can see through this nonsense budget that there is no plan from the Trudeau government to return to a balanced budget, but this should not be a shock to anyone. Prime Minister Trudeau already abandoned his 2015 election promise of three years of modest deficits, followed by a balanced budget. This was long gone before the pandemic hit. Trudeau was content with having large deficits for decades to come. Albertans understood this this last election. That is why you don't see any red on our federal electoral map in Alberta.

We need to call upon all Canadians to see this as a wake-up call and to look for a change. At this rate every man, woman, and child in Canada will now owe over \$33,000 in federal debt. This means higher taxes for hard-working Canadians. No one should support this. I call upon everyone in Canada, especially those in Ontario that have elected the most Liberal seats in the country, to please think of the future generations of Canada that will have to pay off this debt, which is set to cross the \$1 trillion mark. We need financial responsibility in the federal government, and we need it now.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout and Paid Leave for Employees

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I and many Albertans were so encouraged to hear that the Premier is willing to work with our caucus to draft legislation to allow working Albertans paid leave for vaccination. Alberta workers need to have access to this paid leave for vaccination. This leave is critical for Alberta's recovery because we all know that widespread vaccinations are the single most important factor in getting our small businesses and the economy running sooner. But to reach that goal, we know that we need to tear down all possible barriers that might impede people from getting vaccinated, including potential loss of pay. If you work in a restaurant, a meat-packing plant, or a retail store, if you're paid by the hour, fee for service, or by commission, it's really important that workers are not faced with the difficult choice between preserving their income or getting their vaccine.

To be clear, those that depend on paid leave to get vaccinated faster are some of the front-line workers and heroes that have continued to work throughout this pandemic and continue to keep society going and keep us safe. It makes sense to make it easier for them to get vaccinated. We have seen British Columbia and Saskatchewan step up and do the right thing by implementing a paid leave to this effect, both of which, I'm so pleased to say, were heavily supported by employers in the private sector. I and my caucus are very eager to get the needed amendments across the finish line to get Alberta's front-line heroes time to get their vaccination. We can help workers. We can help our vaccine efforts. We can help our economic recovery. This is a really great thing, and I'm very excited to be a part of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a statement.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear frequently that the stress and fatigue caused by COVID-19 are taking a toll on the

people across my riding of Leduc-Beaumont, and people are eager to get back to their life as they want to live it. I remain optimistic that there is hope and that we are getting closer each day as the level of vaccinations pick up, and we are finally receiving more. The province has always been ready to get vaccines into the arms of Albertans, and the failures of the federal government have slowed us down.

Over the last several weeks we have received half a million doses of COVID-19 vaccine, with another 250,000 expected this week. This will allow us to expand our vaccine rollout, and that is exactly what we are doing. By moving into phase 2C of our vaccination rollout, an additional 240,000 Albertans will be eligible. This means our front-line health care workers, who were not eligible in previous phases, will now be able to book their vaccines. Other people who are eligible are over the age of 65, First Nations who are 50-plus, and anyone who is over the age of 16 with a pre-existing medical condition. On Tuesday we expanded the eligibility for anyone aged 40 and older to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine. As of last Wednesday we reached a milestone figure, and now we have administered 1.19 million doses of vaccine and approximately 1 million first doses and 239,000 second doses.

The more people we vaccinate and the quicker we vaccinate them, the sooner we'll be able to see restrictions lifted. We are moving closer and closer to normal. I understand that many Albertans are tired of this – we all are – but we are almost there, and I encourage all Albertans who are eligible to receive a vaccination do so as soon as possible.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to rise today in the Assembly to present a petition representing over 1,900 signatories from three constituencies in north-central Alberta that are served by highway 55. The petitioners are from around the Barrhead, Lac La Biche, Bonnyville leading to Fort McMurray area, and they are urging strongly that the government expedite the reconstruction and repair of this extremely dangerous highway, which has really been deteriorated. It is extraordinary that 1,900-plus signatures were gathered during a pandemic, when you couldn't actually go door to door. Great work on their behalf.

1:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 70, the COVID-19 Related Measures Act, sponsored by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

I also wish to give oral notice of Government Motion 76, sponsored by myself, which reads:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) for the duration of the 2021 spring sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature the Assembly must sit on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings for consideration of government business unless under Notices of Motions or at any time before the Assembly adjourns on a sitting day the Government House Leader or a member of the Executive Council on the Government House Leader's behalf advises the Assembly of the morning sittings that are no longer required.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has the call.

School Closures and COVID-19 Response

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday this Premier's Education minister waxed poetic about all the school boards staying open. Roughly 15 minutes later we learned 68,000 students in Edmonton will be sent home tomorrow. Guess what? Contrary to what the Premier says, that will impact their learning. There are still things that the Premier can do to make schools safer by ensuring they have the resources they need to stay open – wait for it – safely. Will the Premier agree to use his contingency fund to provide the resources necessary to get these schools back open sooner and then keep them open?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to keep things in perspective, there are 3,200 active cases amongst students and staff out of 720,000. That's .4 per cent. The measures that the minister is taking in co-ordination with the school boards demonstrate the degree to which Alberta is exercising great caution to ensure the operation of schools. This does affect, of course, online learning for two-week periods in those school boards that have requested it, that have met certain metrics, to ensure that they have the capacity. We'll continue to work with them to ensure the safe operation of schooling.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Education minister actually claimed she was proud of her work to keep schools open, except documents show that this minister ignored the warnings of school boards from day one. Now we have a chronic teacher shortage, sending more than 160,000 students home with no warning. The Premier could support these kids now learning from home by hiring new graduate teachers. Will the Premier consider this opportunity to undo the harm he's already caused and maybe, just maybe, start helping Alberta's kids?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta, again, has taken extraordinary measures to ensure the safe operation of schools, including setting up an expert contact tracing investigation team, which since January has been doing 24-hour turnaround on school-related cases. We've rolled out 400,000 rapid test kits for schools. We provided I think something in the range of \$20 million in additional funding for school boards to provide for necessary equipment and hire additional custodial staff. We've worked very closely with superintendents and boards and will continue to do so.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, here are the Premier's actual plans about schools: one, starve the schools of funding; two, fail to prevent community spread; three, denigrate teachers daily; four, gaslight Albertans on in-school infections; five, ignore responsibility for school safety; and six, then fail 160,000 Alberta kids.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Notley: As a result, we have outbreaks at 567 schools, teachers are in isolation, and students are in isolation. The Premier could have prevented this by investing in school safety from the start. Will he do it now?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:54.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, all six of those points were complete falsehoods. I don't have time in 30 seconds to rebut them all, but the notion that the government denigrates teachers is absurd and beneath the member opposite. My dad was a teacher. Why would anybody denigrate teachers? We respect teachers. We don't always agree with the union leadership, but one thing we know is that if the NDP was in office, all of those schools would have been closed since last spring, all year long. That is their policy. They

know we can't build 2,400 new schools, and they know that every other party of the left has done the same thing all across North America.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Federal Child Care Program

Ms Notley: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier doesn't have a lot of mothers of young children in his circle, but our caucus has heard from hundreds in the last 24 hours alone. They worry this Premier is going to stand in the way of their kid receiving affordable, high-quality child care.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Notley: Jennifer Usher in the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta said that Ottawa's plan, quote, actually increases parental choice because we will see parents be able to choose many more programs because they'll be affordable. Mr. Speaker, what does the Premier have against offering parents more affordable choice in child care?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:55.

The hon. the Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course I know of a lot of mothers with young children in my circle, including ministers in this government and members of this government caucus. All of us share the concern that many parents face with respect to access to child care. Albertans want support for child care that respects their choices and their priorities, not Ottawa's choices and Ottawa's priorities. I would invite the leader of the NDP to join with us in calling on the federal government for maximum flexibility. I know that for the NDP this is just about subsidizing union jobs. We think it should be about kids first.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier is fearmongering to block quality child care, plain and simple. There's not a single union-run child care centre in the province.

Under our plan, however, there were a growing number of skilled, well-paid caregivers helping children grow and learn in their formative years. If by institutionalized child care the Premier means early learning programs, toys, friendships, and a playground full of brightly coloured equipment where even he could find joy, so be it. Why is the Premier so committed to blocking children from experiencing these positive opportunities?

Mr. Kenney: Sometimes when I listen to the NDP leader's questions, I wonder what kind of overcaffeinated undergrad is writing those questions. I mean, it sounds like left-wing Twitter. Some of it is so risible. Creating fear? I'm simply asking for maximum flexibility. Does that scare the NDP, that Ottawa should give more policy flexibility to reflect the choices of parents? Is that fearful, Mr. Speaker? No. It's the right thing to do, to trust parents rather than bureaucrats when it comes to child care.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to overcaffeinated undergrads, the Premier's staff are actually arguing that we don't need universal child care because only 1 in 7 parents choose it. All that means is that there are six other parents searching Facebook for child care openings. He claims that 23,000 are subsidized, but the demand is five times that. The cost to families is thousands of dollars, over half their monthly income. That's why families stay home. That's why they don't grow the economy. What exactly does

the Premier have against giving women and parents the choice to keep working?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I don't. The government doesn't. That's a complete fabrication. I don't understand why the member is opposed to maximum flexibility. For moms and dads who might choose to have a neighbour or a relative do some informal child care – they might provide them with some compensation – that doesn't fit in the Ottawa program. Shift workers are left out, most rural people are excluded, and people on First Nations reserves would get nothing out of this. Why doesn't she care about those families? Why won't she stand up and fight for them and demand maximum flexibility from her friend Justin Trudeau?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is next.

School Closures and COVID-19 Response

(continued)

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, junior and senior high school students in Edmonton public and Catholic schools got sent home yesterday for at least the third time in a year. The Premier didn't even bother to mention this when he was in front of the media yesterday. Is it because the Premier wasn't aware that schools in Edmonton were being closed yet again, or is it because he didn't care?

Mr. Kenney: Of course we care, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education is in contact with relevant school boards as she addresses these issues. But the NDP from day one has tried to inspire fear in parents and teachers with respect to in-classroom instruction. The reality is that in the course of this year there have been 1,800 cases detected of in-school transmission. That's out of 720,000 students. That means that 99.75 per cent of students have not been affected by in-classroom instruction. If you listen to the NDP, you would think it's the majority of kids. Shame on them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Hoffman: Premier, the number one reason school boards have given for closing is close contacts in school that force teachers to isolate. In some cases they've also become sick. There are still a couple of months left in the school year. It's not too late to act. Will the Premier commit today to using a portion of the contingency fund they've already put aside in the budget to keep classrooms running and running safely? We know that there are 2,000 students set to graduate right away who could help supply staff in our schools.

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP's deeply socialist conviction is that we can even make a pandemic go away by spending money. Signing cheques does not stop viral spread. The reality is that we have seen COVID as a challenge in the education systems everywhere around the world, with one exception, where left-wing governments at the behest of their special-interest friends have shut down in-classroom instruction, imposing lifetime damage on those kids, especially from disadvantaged families, and that's why we won't follow the NDP's advice in this respect.

Ms Hoffman: I'm not asking the Premier to try to justify why he's done nothing to date; I'm asking him to actually do something now. Premier, we did the rough calculations. To hire those 2,000 new graduates for the remainder of this school year would cost about \$30 million. You know what else costs about \$30 million? Your Tom Olsen vanity project war room. Just some perspective, Premier.

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Hoffman: Will the Premier commit \$30 million to hire teachers for the remainder of the school year right here, right now to keep schools open and make them safer?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:01.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I won't commit to live in the same fantasyland as the NDP, where we could open 2,400 schools and hire thousands of new teachers overnight. They know it's fake. They know it's a fake talking point for their real agenda. Now, I would like to hear that member stand up for once and say that schools are safe for in-classroom instruction, that 99.75 per cent of Alberta's students have not been affected by in-classroom instruction. Will she stop the fear and instead instill confidence in the safety of schools? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic at Cargill Canada

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the workers at Alberta's Cargill meat-packing plant have been through so much in this pandemic: the agriculture minister telling them that their workplace was safe when he'd been briefed about workplace transmission, one of the largest outbreaks in North America, the tragic loss of three lives, and thousands infected. That's why it was so upsetting to read that these workers were informed late last night that Alberta Health Services is delaying plans to vaccinate them. These workers served through some the worst of this pandemic, and they have already faced many hurdles accessing health care. Why did the government pull the rug out from the employees of Cargill, and when will these workers be able to get vaccinated?

Mr. Kenney: We didn't, Mr. Speaker. Let me explain a very basic concept to the NDP. There is too little vaccine supply. We saw Moderna cut their projected deliveries of vaccines by more than half to Alberta recently. It was those vaccines that were destined to the Cargill plant. I would like to hear the NDP stand up for once and hold the government of Canada to account for Canada being 50th in the world in per capita access to vaccines, which is why this is moving more slowly than we all want.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this clinic was scheduled to start giving vaccines tomorrow, dates that this government set. Eighty per cent of the workforce at Cargill had filled out their paperwork to get the vaccine, only to be informed last night that it would be delayed, with no idea of when the clinic would return. Cargill has stated that their teams are ready to take action when the time comes, so the only holdup is this government. As I understand, this Premier has been talking about the hundreds of thousands of vaccines we currently have. Can the Premier tell the House: when will their time finally come? Next week, next month? Make it happen.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, a complete – and the member must know – complete, total falsehood to suggest that there are hundreds of thousands of vaccines on the shelf.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, with the rollout of the AstraZeneca to those over 40 we are quickly running down inventories. Most of the people who work in those plants are under the age of 40 and therefore don't qualify for AstraZeneca. Is she, therefore, suggesting that we take Pfizer and Moderna, that are designated for health care workers dealing with COVID patients, and instead reallocate that? This is the problem of scarcity. When will she understand that?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:05.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, let's remember that on the same town hall where the minister of agriculture told these workers that their Cargill job site was safe when it was not, the minister of labour praised and thanked the workers for their work. Now, after everything that they have gone through – the sickness, the stress, the anxiety, the loss of life – they feel like the government is not following through on a vaccination clinic that they were counting on. If the government values the work of the employees at Cargill and recognizes what they have already been through, can they now commit to fulfilling their promise of a vaccination clinic? These workers deserve this reassurance.

Mr. Kenney: Well, the answer is an unqualified yes, as soon as we have the supply. But just a few days ago Moderna informed us that they were cutting 65,000 doses in shipments that we were expecting this week, which were going to go straight to Cargill, in part, for that clinic. Now, could the member help me understand: how should we vaccinate people with doses that do not exist? Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP is not very good with math. That's more clear now than ever. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Child Care

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Monday's federal budget the Liberals committed to a national child care program that would set fees for licensed daycare spaces to an average of \$10 a day. When asked about the program, which is so far sparse on details, the Minister of Children's Services and the Minister of Finance indicated that any national child care program must be flexible. To the minister: can you tell us what the federal Liberals' national early learning and child care plan means for Alberta child care operators, educators, and parents?

Mr. Glubish: Thank you to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, we know that affordability, accessibility, and quality are all important factors for parents to consider when choosing child care. When we talk about flexibility, we're acknowledging that private child care operators make up 60 per cent of the child care programs in Alberta, most of which are actually owned and operated by female entrepreneurs. That's why we're not interested in a one-size-fits-all approach to our unique mixed child-care system. As the member noted, we don't have many details yet on this program from the feds, and we would like to find out how much this would cost for Alberta taxpayers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you. Given that many Alberta parents don't work typical nine-to-five hours, especially in ridings like mine, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, where many families have specifically asked for more flexible options, including overnight and 24-hour care, and given that any child care program rolled out in the province must accommodate all families, including those where typical daycares might not be the best fit, to the minister: what steps have been taken to increase the access to flexible and overnight child care throughout rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. We know that parents in isolated areas like Fort

McMurray need more access to child care because that's what they've consistently told us. This past February we made it easier for Alberta parents like nurses, firefighters, and other professions who do shift work to access child care by allowing overnight care and extended hours. We also just wrapped up an expression of interest that will add 1,500 child care spaces across the province. We're excited to make these investments and will continue to listen to Alberta families.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that we're all committed to providing the highest standard of care for our kids and supporting working parents and families, particularly women, and given that the federal Liberals hold the Quebec model up as the gold standard for child care and given that they suggest that this approach should be rolled out all across Canada, to the minister: is this a model that could be easily implemented here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. Quebec's child care landscape is far different than what we see in Alberta. As I said, we have a mixed model of private and nonprofit child care programs, and Quebec has government-run child care centres as well. We also know that people pay far more taxes in Quebec. For example, a family with an income of \$150,000 paid about \$16,000 more in taxes than a family in Alberta. Are Alberta taxpayers willing to pay more for a universal system that only benefits a few, or can we continue to make decisions that better serve all families in this province?

COVID-19 Cases in Banff-Kananaskis

Member Ceci: Yesterday it was reported that Banff now has the highest rate of COVID-19 cases per capita in all of Alberta. The director of emergency management for Banff stated that COVID has a stranglehold on us here in the valley, and we have to do everything we can to shake it loose. As a member of the anti public health caucus the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis believes the solution is fewer measures. Can the Minister of Health explain specifically what is being done to address this rush of COVID-19 cases in Banff and tell his colleague . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

Member Ceci: . . . what public health measures need to be addressed?

2:10

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, part of that question is not about government business, and I'll leave it for that member, then, to speak with our colleague about any questions he has about what's been said.

But the question about what's being done for cases that are in the valley. We continue to make sure that AHS and our public health officials have all the resources that they need to be able to respond to and help those communities. We also have the community outreach program to help people with their isolation supports if they need it, if they can't isolate, if they live in a place where they cannot be separate from other people in their household. We're going to continue to do exactly what we've been doing, Mr. Speaker, respond to the pandemic and protect lives and livelihoods.

The Speaker: I will note that a point of order was noted at 2:10.

Member Ceci: Given that both the mayors of Banff and Canmore have spoken about the actions of their MLA and stated that her actions have undermined public health in their communities and given that the mayor of Canmore reported that it had been a year since he had any contact with his MLA and that he feels like Canmore is not even represented in the Legislature and given the concerning case growth of COVID-19 in Banff, can the minister go on to tell us what more will be done to address the needs of people during this pandemic?

Mr. Shandro: Given that most of that preamble, Mr. Speaker, had nothing to do with government business – and as a member of this Assembly who has a riding with boundaries that do touch Calgary-Buffalo, I often have to, throughout my constituency work, help businesses that are in Calgary-Buffalo that are ignored by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. It's a disappointing situation, that he continues to be an absent member for those businesses, not advocating for them. I'm very happy to do the work for him.

Member Ceci: Given that Canmore council wrote a letter which urged their MLA to make a determined effort to reach out and hear all perspectives in the community before taking such actions as refuting the need for continued caution and containing the virus and given that the mayor of Banff stated that the MLA was not speaking for the majority of the population when she signed on with the anti public health caucus . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Member Ceci: . . . will the minister commit to more regular speaking with town councils in Banff and Canmore about their COVID-19 cases so that they can get this outbreak under control?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:12.
The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, AHS and our public health officials will continue to be able to provide all the supports that are required to respond to the pandemic not just there but in any places where we have increases in growth of COVID in our communities. In particular, right there, right now I know that AHS is working on the ground to help those communities, continuing to make sure that they are providing all the resources that are needed to protect lives and livelihoods, as I said before. Happy to repeat the answer to that question a second time for the member since he missed it the first time.

Member Ceci: Good for you. Good for you.

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

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we learned that Red Deer College is increasing tuition for courses by the maximum amount, making it harder for students to afford their education. This was salt in the wounds for students already disheartened by the government's decision to stop the college from transitioning to a degree-granting university. To the minister: how does charging students hundreds more for their tuition and denying the city of Red Deer a university help us to build a new economic future for our province?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, we know that tuition is the main way that students invest in their education, and an Alberta postsecondary

education provides significant value for that money. A postsecondary education greatly improves social and economic outcomes, and we're working on increasing the return on investment by strengthening the connection between education and jobs. We also know that tuition in Alberta is still far below Ontario and the national average, so we are focused on ensuring that we can have a long-term, sustainable, and strong postsecondary system and ensuring that it is accessible to students and that we can connect them to jobs after their studies.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that after three successive destructive budgets by this UCP government tuition is certainly not the lowest in Canada, by a long shot, in this province and given that these increases have been making school unaffordable in Red Deer and right across the province, north to south, will the minister at least consult with students about tuition hikes being planned here and across the province, and will he step in and reinstate a tuition cap at a rate of inflation to make college more affordable for our students?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Advanced Education consults all the time – he listens to students, he listens to families, he listens to educators and academic institutions – and he's been working hard to ensure that he can deliver on a commitment to ensure that we have a long-term, sustainable, and strong postsecondary system that will connect students from their studies to meaningful full employment when they are completed. That is what students need. They need to have strong employment, they need to have a future, they need to have hope for a bright future, and that's what this Advanced Education minister is working hard to deliver.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the minister listens to students and then ignores their concerns – no one told him to put in massive tuition increases that make it unaffordable for many students to be able to go to school next year – and given that if this access is threatened, we could be denying some of our brightest young minds, Albertans that could help us diversify our economy in Edmonton and Calgary and Lethbridge and throughout this great province, will the minister commit to an independent study of the impact that massive tuition increases being caused by this government are actually having on our students and the future of all of us here in the province of Alberta?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate for the benefit of the member opposite that Alberta's tuition rates are still below those in Ontario and below the national average. We know that it is important to ensure that we have a long-term, sustainable, and strong postsecondary system. That's what the Minister of Advanced Education is working hard to deliver. I'm really excited about the work he's doing on the Alberta 2030, building skills for jobs program, which he will be releasing more information on, and I think that that's going to help to illustrate for the members opposite what a long-term, sustainable, and strong postsecondary system can look like here in Alberta that will ensure that students get access to jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

Restaurants and COVID-19

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is no secret that the restaurant industry has taken a major beating due to public health restrictions this past year. In fact, a recent ATB report found that total food

industry sales between March 2020 and January 2021 were 30 per cent lower when compared to the previous period a year before. Full-service restaurants, bars, and pubs have been hit the hardest. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: what has the government done to help the restaurant industry during this difficult time?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. We want to thank all the restaurant owners across Alberta for all their hard work throughout this pandemic to keep their employees healthy as well as keeping their customers healthy. We've asked them to do a lot, and we want to thank them. Throughout this pandemic we've been there to support them with our relaunch grant that went to the end of March. We had almost 100,000 small businesses across Alberta apply for up to \$20,000 of support. With the most recent health measures we're opening up, at the end of this week, the relaunch grant again for another \$10,000 right here in Alberta. We expect that that's going to help about 50,000 businesses across our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for your answer. Given that many Albertans employed in the food industry have seen their hours reduced or even have lost their jobs entirely and given that many restaurants have gone out of business or are struggling to just make it through this recent wave of public health measures and given that many food industry workers believe that they should have received the critical worker benefit, can the same minister let this House know if any additional assistance will be provided to our struggling food service industry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've worked diligently with our federal counterparts. There have been rent supports for businesses as well as wage supports. We put in place the relaunch grant that's opening up at the end of this week. We encourage small businesses across Alberta to google three words: biz, connect, Alberta. That'll take you to the website with the portal. You can apply there; the same application as the earlier rounds, the same qualifications. We encourage businesses to do that. Seventy-five per cent of the businesses qualify, and money goes out the door within 10 days. Additional ones require some further work. We work with them to get their applications through as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government reduced restrictions on in-person dining in February – and that helped many restaurants that were struggling months before, until the recent restrictions were brought in – and given that the COVID-19 numbers are now increasing again and could stay high for some time and given that many small-business owners have told me that they don't want more programs to fill their empty pockets, can the Minister of Health give this House a timeline as to when he thinks restaurants may be able to reopen to in-person dining?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. We want to reopen restaurants to in-person dining as soon as it's

safe to do so. Right now we're seeing rising cases and asking everyone to limit their in-person interactions and to help bend the curve, so Dr. Hinshaw and health officials are monitoring the spread closely to assess when measures can be eased safely. There's no question that vaccinations are our ticket out of this. Despite setbacks from the federal government, we're getting vaccines in the arms of Albertans as quickly and safely as possible, with more than 1.2 million doses given so far.

2:20

Addiction Treatment

Ms Sigurdson: Albertans are dying in unprecedented numbers from preventable overdoses because this UCP government is denying them the health care that they need. Two hundred and thirty-eight Albertans died in just the first two months of this year – that's more than four people every single day – yet this government continues to refuse to provide the life-saving services their own advisers are calling for. Will the minister admit that his approach to addiction treatment has completely failed?

Mr. Shandro: No, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the lives of many Albertans, including those who are struggling with a substance use disorder. We are seeing similar numbers to what other provinces throughout the country are seeing, like B.C. While opioid overdose deaths are still higher than prepandemic levels, it is promising that in February there was a 27 per cent decrease in opioid overdose deaths since July's peak. Now, while that's promising, certainly there's much more work to be done. Albertans can get opioid agonist treatment on demand by calling the virtual opioid dependency program from anywhere in the province.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that deaths this year are more than double what they were last year and higher than any time in our province's history and given that the minister's own hand-picked advisers tell him that supervised consumption services save lives, when will the minister put aside the Premier's own personal prejudices and expand access to supervised consumption as a critical on-ramp to treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no doubt that we face an addiction crisis in our province. We're looking at many different strategies to be able to address this. We have made investments in opioid agonist therapies, detox, medical detox, support recovery, residential addiction treatment, as well as investments in the virtual opioid dependency program that I mentioned, the virtual ODP, which currently has no wait-list in Alberta.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the associate minister also personally cancelled a life-saving AHS overdose prevention app last year in favour of one that doesn't even work yet and will only work in the city of Calgary, to the minister. Four Albertans are dying every day. How many days until your app works?

Mr. Shandro: Look, Mr. Speaker, this is the NDP continuing to grandstand on an issue. That is really unfortunate. We continue to see, in particular, that member sometimes misrepresent the information to Albertans, in particular with this issue . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Shandro: . . . and with other issues throughout the pandemic. We're focused on getting Albertans who need it into recovery, Mr. Speaker. We eliminated user fees for publicly funded residential

addiction treatment. The NDP forced people to pay for that. We are publicly funding residential addiction treatment so that anyone can get treatment regardless of their financial situation. That's because we have a focus on what's right for the patients who need it.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:23.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Coal Development Policies

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tearing up the eastern slopes for coal will hurt farmers. The damage to land and water is not worth it. But the UCP coal committee claims that impacts on both land or water are out of scope and not within the purview of the Ministry of Energy. Since the UCP always clearly states that they are proud of the minister of agriculture and the fact that he's a farmer, I'm sure that he knows that the concerns around land and water are relevant to farmers. Will the minister advocate on behalf of farmers to ensure that land and water are within scope of the coal consultations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, the coal consultation is under way. It's an issue that Albertans have made very clear to our government they are wound up about and interested in. As always, we listen to Albertans. We will be paying, as we are already paying, careful attention to that. But I'll also remind the hon. member that she was less concerned about coal when they were in government, when their environment minister actually allowed it in the category 2 lands.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I'm talking about land access and water and given that I have spoken to many farmers and ranchers who are rightly frustrated with the UCP government for ignoring them on the concerns around coal – they feel abandoned by the UCP MLAs that claim to represent them – and given that the plan to strip-mine Alberta's mountains, pollute our waters, and tear up our land for coal development was . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Sweet: . . . generally undertaken in secret and given that they're only consulting now because they got caught and given that coal development impacts farmers in a very close and extraordinary way and I believe that farmers should have a seat at the table, will the government commit to putting a rancher or farmer who resides near the eastern slopes on the coal consultation committee?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:25.
The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. member and all Albertans that this government cares very much about agriculture. Our agriculture minister is a multigeneration farmer. He is very well in touch with people. Again, I will take no advice from the NDP on supporting agriculture after what they did with Bill 6, where they had tens of thousands of people for weeks on end out in front of this building going crazy because they disrespected farmers and ranchers so badly. They accused them of not caring about public safety. They said that they were going to create an attitude of safety. They disrespected farmers and ranchers severely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact that many of those farmers and ranchers are speaking out to me should make you very concerned about the coal policy.

Given that the UCP can brag about irrigation expansion all they want, if the water is not clean, it's meaningless. Given that farmers expect the minister of agriculture to advocate on their behalf in the government, we should be hearing more from this minister. To the minister of agriculture specifically: will he commit today to demanding that the farmers' concerns on the impact of open-pit mining in the eastern slopes on both land and water will be heard in this consultation? Will he commit today to meeting with me and the farmers and ranchers impacted to hear their concerns? I'll even set the meeting up for you.

The Speaker: An experienced parliamentarian like yourself will know that the use of a preamble after question 4 is not allowed.

Mr. McIver: Well, it's fun to hear the hon. members across talk about how they care about agriculture after they absolutely dragged them through the slime and the mud when they were in government, disrespected them to the point where there were tens of thousands out here for days on end, Mr. Speaker. But I can assure you that our current Minister of Agriculture and Forestry cares very much and is in touch with farmers and ranchers constantly, always has done, still does, and always will bring their interests to government because that is what he is good at.

Ms Sweet: So that's a no.

The Speaker: Order. Order. The member had her opportunity; the minister will have his.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Schedule

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, Albertans across the province have stepped up during this pandemic. Our incredible and valued teachers in particular have continued their great work to inspire young minds both online and in person. I know that I'm glad to have my children in in-person classes, which hasn't been possible in many jurisdictions around the western world. But many teachers are concerned that they are not given a higher priority for the vaccine. To the Minister of Health: why have teachers not been given a higher priority to receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're getting vaccines to Albertans as quickly and as safely as possible. As the member knows, we are dependent on the federal government for supply. Now, currently anyone over the age of 40 and Albertans over 16 with underlying health conditions are eligible to get their vaccines. This includes teachers. We want to vaccinate many more people. We would have wanted to vaccinate them months ago, but we can't give out doses that we just do not have. As more supply arrives, we'll continue to expand eligibility, and we're on track to offer every Albertan over 18 a dose by the end of June.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that teachers interact with students daily and are more at risk for COVID-19 than other occupations and given that there are concerns that the new variants could cause more problems for younger people than the original strain and given that

Calgary and Edmonton public and separate school districts are bringing grades 7 to 12 online, can the same minister let us know how the variants could affect younger people and if that puts our teachers at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers play a vital role in our path to recovery. Evidence shows that the variants not only are more contagious but can also cause more severe illness. This is true for all ages, so this is why we're focused on vaccinating those who are most at risk of severe outcomes first, including anyone over 16 with underlying health conditions. We will open up eligibility, as I said, even further once supply allows for that opening. In the meantime we're asking Albertans to please be patient while we wait for the Trudeau government to provide those vaccines, but we're doing everything in our power to protect Albertans and put this pandemic behind us as soon as possible.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given that firefighters put their lives on the line for us to be safe every day and given that COVID-19 numbers have been increasing among firefighters in recent weeks and given that Edmonton's fire chief has pleaded for firefighters to get access to the vaccine because of the number of absentees and growing costs of overtime, can the Minister of Health please let the House know what we are doing to vaccinate firefighters at this time?

2:30

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite setbacks from the federal government, we are expanding eligibility faster than other jurisdictions in Canada. To date we've given I think about 1.2 million doses, and that's, again, limited by supply. We have the capacity to do a million doses a month if we didn't have that supply issue. Our government values the roles of first responders. We know that they do important work. Firefighters are able to book their vaccine if they meet the current eligibility criteria. Some firefighters who are also paramedics were immunized in January during the phase 1A rollout, and any firefighter paramedics not included then are eligible now in phase 2C as health care workers.

Racism and Hate Promotion Prevention

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, tackling racism is a nonpartisan activity. I was proud to see this legislation unanimously adopted, the motion of the Member for Edmonton-South to condemn and reject symbols of hatred. This government was unable to commit yesterday to the member when they would implement the calls to action of this motion. A lot of Albertans concerned by this, the increasing cases of racism, are eager for an answer. To the minister: what specific actions are you taking to follow through on the motion from Edmonton-South? Can the Official Opposition assist with creating legislation to ban hate symbols in public in our province?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the aisle we have always been clear from day one that we condemn acts of racism, discrimination, and hate symbols, but I think it's important, you know, that it tells more about the members opposite that would want to play politics with this particular issue. This is a deep issue that affects all Albertans, especially people from the minority communities. I think we can all agree to focus on what we can do

to make sure that we build a province in which everyone can live their full potential and not on political football.

Mr. Deol: Given that the Member for Edmonton-South's motion highlighted the importance of working together to combat racism and given that the minister could not commit to a timeline or even to working with the Member for Edmonton-South to accomplish the achievement of this motion, will the minister commit today to a meeting with myself and the Member for Edmonton-South to develop a strategy to implement the critical objectives of this motion, and will the minister also commit to fully briefing us on the recommendations from the first Alberta antiracism council recommendations, that we understand were delivered to her in January?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, you know, this government has done more to deal with racism and discrimination and build equal opportunity for every Albertan in six months than the NDP did throughout their four years in office. I want to restate before the floor of this Assembly that perhaps that question should be addressed to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who was the minister of carding, the minister who said before the floor of this House that she doesn't think that carding is a thing.

Mr. Deol: Given that Albertans were horrified to see torch marches at the Legislature and given that no one should ever see such expressions of racist hatred anywhere in this province and given that those symbols embolden hate, terrorize residents, and can act as a catalyst for violent acts, like attacks we have seen on Muslim women in Calgary and Edmonton, and given that the minister just chooses to ignore my questions at every chance, for the record of this House: did the government vote in favour of this motion from the Member for Edmonton-South simply for show, or will they take actual action on the commitments it made?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I restate that we have done more than the members opposite did in the four years that they were in office. We have banned carding. Bill 63 is before the floor of this Assembly. We introduced Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, that introduced for the first time the First Nation police and police services commission. We are prepared and ready to do more to ensure that everyone – cultural, minority, indigenous communities – feels safe, respected, and protected in our province, but we will not play politics with racism and discrimination.

Member Ceci: By doing what?

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is the one with the call.

Supervised Consumption Site Review Committee Expense Audit

Ms Sigurdson: Members of a UCP panel were caught dining out on luxury meals, alcohol, and personal travel at taxpayers' expense. In August the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions promised a full investigation. I asked the Minister of Health for an update in estimates, and he said that the investigation was still ongoing. But we know now that this audit is complete and its findings passed on to the Minister of Finance. Was the Minister of Health really unaware of a damning audit of his own department, and if he was aware, why did he deny it in estimates?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I was advised via – and I do still believe that it was in the middle of still being completed. Now that it has been completed, I look forward to it being forwarded to the people who need to have it forwarded to them. But at that time, in estimates, it was still being completed, and there's nothing else to say about it.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that while this UCP government was running the largest deficit in Alberta history, hand-picked UCP panellists were billing Alberta taxpayers for steak dinners, prime rib, crème brûlée, and avocado toast and given that public servants repeatedly raised the alarm about excessive and unreasonable spending but the minister did nothing, will he commit to tabling this audit report in the House today? What's he hiding?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, nothing is being hidden. I understand that many of those members did repay back those amounts. Look, there was an investigation and that report is going to be forwarded, but this idea that anything is being hidden and us being accused by a caucus who continues the secrecy in protecting members of their caucus, previous or current, from allegations of sexual misconduct is so rich. Let them call on their leader . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Shandro: . . . to start giving the police the information that she knows so that those victims could be protected.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:37.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the hand-picked panel co-chair attempted to bill Alberta taxpayers for thousands of kilometres of personal travel expenses before being caught by public servants and that the Minister of Health rewarded this unacceptable behaviour by appointing her to yet another government panel, doesn't the minister have any respect for Alberta taxpayers? Why won't he release the secret audit report today?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, we continue to be transparent, much more transparent than the previous government. We will continue to protect the taxpayers' dollars. We will continue to spend their money respectfully and responsibly, and I will not take advice on secrecy from the most secretive caucus, that continues to protect their members from allegations of sexual misconduct.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:38.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Rural Addiction and Mental Health Services

Ms Goodridge: Thank you. Access to mental health and addiction supports has been crucial over the last year as many Albertans have struggled with the social isolation and economic impacts of the COVID pandemic. Those living in rural Alberta are particularly vulnerable due to community isolation and limited opportunities for employment. The year 2020 was the deadliest year for overdoses in Fort McMurray since the province started tracking overdoses in 2016. To the minister: what work is this government doing to address addictions in rural Alberta communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. Albertans can get opioid agonist treatment on demand by calling the virtual ODP, opioid dependency program,

from anywhere in the province. Alberta also has 23 opioid clinics across the province that are providing gold standard care, and we're very proud of that. All of these supports are saving lives in our province.

Ms Goodridge: Given that many youth are struggling with mental health and addiction in Fort McMurray due to the pandemic and given that many youth have been struggling as they haven't been able to play in organized sports and other physical activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to the minister: what is this government doing to specifically address the obstacles that youth in rural Alberta face in seeking mental health supports?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for the question. In addition to the support that is provided to Alberta youth by our front-line health care workers, Alberta also has a wide range of resources for youth struggling with mental health, after investing \$53 million in the COVID mental health and addiction action plan. These supports include investments in the Kids Help Phone, the mental health helpline, a hub of resources available at jack.org/abhub as well as 211.

2:40

Ms Goodridge: Given that having strong home and community supports are key in addiction and mental health recovery and given that youth seeking help with addictions are often sent to larger urban centres to access treatment and given that the families of these youth then have to travel long distances to visit, which means more money spent and time taken off work, to the minister: what supports are available to the families of youth that are struggling with addictions in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government was proud to provide a COVID-19 community grant to Parents Empowering Parents, or PEP, to help families struggling with addiction. This group supports parents to help our youth and adult children with substance abuse and addiction issues through supporting and educating both parents and families. PEP has virtual support meetings, parent mentorships, and even a parent support line. You can call their toll-free number at 1.877.991.2737 to connect with a professional.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has a tabling.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table five photos of a badly damaged highway that is in serious need of repair, highway 55, that I presented a petition on today, to illustrate the state of disrepair.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have a letter that accompanies the petition explaining to the Premier and all members of the Assembly how badly this highway needs repair and begging that it be reprioritized, as the petition urged the government to quickly and urgently repair this highway. Five copies of each.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again today I have copies of many letters that have been sent to me as well as to the Premier, the Education minister, and others regarding feedback with regard to the terrible curriculum that's being proposed by the current government. They wanted to ensure that they're on the record and will be now through this tabling and through the Legislature Library.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, of which there were a couple. The first point of order was raised by the hon. deputy government whip at 1:53. I'm not sure if he'll be arguing it or the hon. Deputy Government House Leader. Whoever. Go ahead; you choose.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. McIver: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At that time the hon. member from the NDP, the leader, as it turns out, gave a shopping list that would be points of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), insulting language likely to create disorder, imputes false or unavowed motives, and making allegations. I think according to the Blues there are about six of those. I think she actually enumerated them from one to six. I think it's obviously insulting language likely to create disorder. It's certainly false and unavowed motives, and, I think, fairly plainly a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate. Given the outcome of the government's do-nothing policies when it comes to keeping Alberta's schools safe from COVID, any reasonable person might assume that this was a list of goals and priorities that the Premier and the government have been operating from. The government may not like to hear this perspective as a matter of debate, but if that's the case, I would suggest that they work on having better responses, work on having better solutions rather than calling a point of order. Albertans are furious about the lack of investment in keeping schools safe in the last year, and our Official Opposition will continue to raise these issues.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a point of order but a continuing of debate on a very significant issue in our province at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. deputy government whip would like to add some additional comments?

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker, just very briefly. I appreciate the remarks from both sides here, but the previous Premier, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, said that the Premier's plan is to denigrate teachers daily. Among that laundry list that was one line in particular that I called the point of order on. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I suspect that you do.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I believe that the remarks from our House leader speak to the point that this is a matter for debate. I would say, rather, that the deputy whip's remarks also speak to the fact that some might consider this

a matter of debate. As the Education critic for the Official Opposition I can tell you that this is how teachers regularly feel. They reach out to me to express their frustration and disrespect on a regular basis. Perhaps the member opposite knows some teachers who don't feel that way, but I certainly know thousands who do.

The Speaker: I think it's important, when we are discussing points of order, that members who wish to add additional comments are providing new comments to the interjections as opposed to just adding their support behind the particular point of order.

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I'm happy to provide for context of the Assembly the comments that were raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition. I think this point with respect to context is important because very clearly the Leader of the Opposition states who she is speaking of.

Well, Mr. Speaker, here are the Premier's actual plans about schools: one, starve the schools of funding; two . . . prevent community spread; three, denigrate teachers daily; four, gaslight Albertans on in-school infections; five, ignore responsibility for school . . . six, then fail 160,000 [school students].

[interjection] I don't need the help from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Then a point of order was raised.

I'm prepared to rule on this point of order. I will find it a point of order today, particularly because it imputes false or unavowed motives of another member, not of the government but certainly of the Premier. It implies that his motives are to do those things. Of course, that would be unparliamentary.

The Leader of the Opposition to apologize and withdraw.

Ms Gray: On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 1:55 the Member for Cardston-Siksika rose on a point of order when the Premier was answering a question from the Leader of the Opposition.

Point of Order Imputing Falsehoods against a Member

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it certainly was a raucous day today from members opposite, and this is just another example of it. As you noted, the point of order was called, and I called it when the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said, "I know the Premier doesn't have a lot of mothers of young children in his circle."

2:50

Mr. Speaker, this language is utterly shameful. I'll draw back to examples when Danielle Smith was drawn into this conversation as well, talking about the matter of children. It is offensive to suggest that the hon. Premier doesn't have any connection with mothers with young children. This is under 23(h), (i), and (j). Again, I find this language despicable. It certainly causes disorder within this Chamber, imputes false motives. I don't know where the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona even gets the gall to say something like this, but I would encourage that she or someone on her behalf retracts and apologizes. Let's elevate the level of debate and decorum in this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Upon review of the comment I would like to withdraw the comment that was made by the member.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:01 a point of order was raised by the Deputy Government House Leader, the Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs.

Point of Order

Referring to a Nonmember

Mr. McIver: Okay. Mr. Speaker, the NDP was kind of on a roll today, at this point under 23(h), (i), and (j) and also (l), which is “introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly.” One of the practices and precedents of the Assembly I expect you will agree with is that we don’t by name insult people that are not here to defend themselves, as was done today. Tom Olsen’s name was used out loud, and he’s certainly not among us to defend himself. It certainly offends the practices and precedents of this place. If the NDP wants to take a run at a department of government or somebody that operates government using a department name, I think that’s generally considered fair game around here, but actually getting that personal with someone’s name and accusing them with false allegations and motives and using insulting language, I believe you will agree, is a point of order and should not be happening and should be apologized for.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For this point of order I’d like to submit two arguments to you. First, Tom Olsen is the name of the person hired to oversee something very unusual within government, a government initiative that’s spending Alberta tax dollars with zero normal transparency, a war room that is not subject to FOIP. As long as this government wants to persist in spending Alberta tax dollars in secretive and shadowy ways, we will name the individuals who are involved in that endeavour. We suggest that the government make this subject to FOIP to make it more transparent, to remove some of that secrecy.

Secondly, the Deputy Government House Leader has suggested that it is counter to the practice to take runs at individuals in this House who are not here, yet his government has done that to labour leaders, to female academics who have suffered harassment, to a number of professionals who have served on boards and agencies, yet because this government wasn’t a fan of their politics, they chose to name them in this place. So my second argument to you, Mr. Speaker, is that the government will regularly name the people that they are interested in talking about yet will call this point of order.

I would suggest that this is a matter of debate. The Official Opposition will continue to advocate respectfully on behalf of all Albertans, and the lack of transparency around the war room continues to be an ongoing concern.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule on point of order 3. While I’m sympathetic to the position that the Deputy Government House Leader takes, certainly there is precedent for people who aren’t inside the Chamber and unable to defend themselves, that we ought to use caution when doing so, but I definitely agree with the Opposition House Leader in her assertion that from time to time the government will raise the names of certain individuals, in particular, as she addressed, labour leaders, who also aren’t inside this Chamber to defend themselves. If both sides would like to cease on that, perhaps decorum would be raised. This is not a point of order; it is a matter of debate.

At 2:05 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order when the Premier was answering a question that she had asked.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is related to 23(h), (i), and (j) and your specific rulings around accusations of lying or misleading. As I understand and have interpreted your rulings, such claims are certainly unparliamentary when directed at an individual. In this case the Premier directed to me as an individual that I was perpetuating falsehoods in this House. There are parliamentary ways to communicate that, talking about a caucus or a party. In this case the Premier, in essence, called me a liar, and I would submit to you that that is point of order and should be apologized for and withdrawn.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’m not sure of exactly what the Premier said, but I remember in general terms that the hon. member talked about I think it was that hundreds of thousands of doses are not being used, something that I expect that the Premier would have better knowledge of than the hon. member. I think that he was pointing that out. I think that that’s legitimate, when the member says something that’s obviously wrong. I think pointing out that something was said out loud that is not correct is within the bounds of this place. It’s not a point of order. I think it’s a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Thank you for your submissions.

I am prepared to rule on point of order 4. I do have the benefit of the Blues. The Premier said: “Mr. Speaker, a complete – and the member must know – complete, total falsehood to suggest that there are hundreds of thousands of vaccines on the shelf.” While there may be a dispute in the facts as to whether or not there are hundreds of thousands of doses on the shelf, of which I don’t personally know the answer, to make the assertion that a member “must know – complete, total falsehood” is certainly implying that they’re lying. I think it would be appropriate for the Deputy Government House Leader to apologize and withdraw.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Premier I will apologize and withdraw those remarks.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:10 the hon. Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order while the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was asking a question.

Point of Order

Epithets

Mr. McIver: It occurs to me, Mr. Speaker – the other side gave us lots of targets today; we probably could have risen on a bunch more points of order – that this is the one where the member across talked about the anti public health caucus, which, of course, doesn’t exist. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), makes allegations against another member, uses abusive and insulting language, and imputes false or unavowed motives to a member, there are a couple of issues with this as well. One, the hon. member didn’t just make an accusation against the government but actually centred out the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, which crosses the line of a point of order. I think that there’s a long-standing practice here that we have more leeway if we talk about the NDP or if they talk about the government than we do have when we centre out individuals. I believe that in the remarks the member crossed that line and should be required to withdraw that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

To the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I believe that points of order 5 and 6 that you raised were fairly similar in nature. Would you mind if we combined them into this one point of order?

Mr. McIver: I think that the same offence was committed twice against the same member, using almost exactly the same words, so my answer is yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, I will take yes for an answer.

The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The two points of order under debate are in effect because we referred to the anti public health caucus. Certainly, we can call the COVID-18 other names, but there is a collection of government MLAs who have signed on to a letter that is widely viewed as undermining public health efforts. A rose by any other name. This group of government MLAs is backbiting Alberta's efforts to truly get past the pandemic, and it does stink, no matter what we call them. I would suggest that this is not a point of order but a matter of debate and a way for us to reference the behaviour of government MLAs right now. Truly, "the anti public health caucus" seems like one of the more friendly ways we can refer to their behaviour.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I am prepared to rule on points of order 5 and 6 with respect to the use of the language that has been noted by both sides of the Assembly. I think that at this point in time I would like to provide a strong warning on the use of inflammatory language. I think that we have seen both sides of the House name other sides. Particularly, I think something that I hear from time to time is: the only member of the capitalist caucus over there. These types of caucuses: of course, they don't exist. But from time to time members will speak specifically about the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview as the only member of the capitalist caucus over there. I think that is an example where a personal identifier of a caucus that doesn't exist has been used by both sides of the Assembly.

3:00

I will, though, like I said, provide caution around this particular issue. Just because something isn't a point of order on one day given the context, it may very well be if it continues to create disorder in the Assembly. As such, I do not find this a point of order but do provide some cautionary words. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Mr. Schow: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Schow: I rise on a point of order under 13(2). The reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is that while I respect the ruling with regard to referring to things as the capitalist caucus or the socialist caucus, we have instances where the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar referred to members on this side as members of the incel caucus, and that was in fact ruled a point of order. Now, I suggest that . . .

The Speaker: No. I've had enough.

Mr. Schow: If I may, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No, you may not. I explained my ruling. When he made that comment, the context was that that was a point of order.

I just explained to you, which is what a 13(2) is, when I explained my ruling and why I made it, that it was based upon the fact that what may be parliamentary today might not be tomorrow. I provided a caution. If the same context was true, then an incel caucus today may not be parliamentary tomorrow.

My point is that that was considered a point of order, and for the record it always would be. But bringing up points of order from the past about things that have already been ruled on as points of order, particularly given the wide range of context that I provided on that point of order – I've made my ruling, and we're moving on.

At 2:23 a point of order was raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader while the Minister of Health was responding to a question.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe you will find this to be very similar to an earlier point of order. Essentially, the Minister of Health accused our critic for seniors of lying. I believe – and I do not have the benefit of the Blues – he specifically singled her out and said, particularly, "that member" and went on to reference misrepresenting the facts. As you have access to the Blues, I hope that I have heard that correctly, and I submit to you that this is a point of order.

The Speaker: I am happy to rule on this without the context of the Deputy Government House Leader, but I'm happy to hear from him if he'd like to provide a submission.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter of debate. I think that the hon. Health minister talked about how members of the other side oftentimes know that things aren't right and they do that. It's a matter of debate. There are often in this place disagreements on what are the actual facts of the situation. This is one of those cases, and I don't believe it's a point of order.

The Speaker: I'm prepared to rule on point of order 7, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. Health minister said this. "We continue to see, in particular, that member" – here's part of the challenge, why it's not going to be a point of order – "sometimes misrepresent the information to Albertans." I don't believe that he actually said that that member misrepresents information or called it a falsehood. There's certainly much more swath here.

While I recognize the concern raised, this is not a point of order. There is no apology required. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:23 the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Transportation called a point of order while the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning was asking a question about coal.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. McIver: I think, Mr. Speaker, this is under 23(h), (i), and (j), making false allegations and imputing "false or unavowed motives." I haven't been able to find it in the notes yet, but it occurs to me that the member across made several accusations in short order that would be grounds for a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). I apologize for not having the exact words memorized, but I believe you'll find them if you have the Blues.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues. I'm not sure if the Opposition House Leader wants to provide context, but I am prepared to rule. Here is exactly what – with the benefit of the Blues, the Member for Edmonton-Manning said the following:

They feel abandoned by the UCP MLAs that claim to represent them – and given that the plan to strip-mine Alberta mountains, pollute our waters, and tear up our land for coal development was generally undertaken in secret and given that they're only consulting now because they got caught . . .

She goes on to talk about coal development.

Certainly, members have a wide range of opinion on what the government may or may not be intending on doing. I consider this to be a matter of debate. This matter is dealt with and concluded.

Points of order 9 and 10 are of a similar nature. They were both raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader at 2:36 and 2:38 in response to the Minister of Health, who was answering a question. The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In my view, these two points of order are the most important before us today because of how offensive the behaviour and the words used in this House were, particularly to me, to members of our caucus. In response to a pressing and relevant question from our seniors' critic, the Minister of Health responded twice, hence the two points of order, by raising extremely sensitive issues from years ago.

Now, we've seen this government use this behaviour on multiple occasions, including times when the Government House Leader has raised these accusations and even named members of our caucus. I submit to you that this is a pattern of the government trying to dissuade the opposition from asking certain types of questions in this House by deflecting with accusations from years ago. It's shameful, creates disorder in this House, and I believe that today, although I do not have the benefit of the Blues, I even heard the Minister of Health refer to police and criminal investigations, which certainly crosses the line of 23(h), (i), and (j) and, I may add, is completely false.

I humbly request to the Speaker that this type of behaviour in this House, this type of trying to suppress the Official Opposition's questions by bringing up topics that are extremely sensitive, should be a point of order. I would request that the Speaker instruct the government to refrain from engaging in that type of behaviour, of trying to dissuade the Official Opposition from doing our jobs and asking tough questions. If they don't have good answers, I submit to them that they should work on getting better answers, not bring up an unrelated issue meant entirely to suppress dissent.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not liking the answer and feeling uncomfortable because of the answer does not make it a point of order. If that were the case, question period would be over. Question period is designed to make people uncomfortable. One of the things that the opposition is uncomfortable about is that in the past – and this isn't a matter of just opinion. I believe that the NDP Party and perhaps even their leader at one point admitted that there were accusations of sexual misconduct within their caucus and have never disclosed who was involved. I think the phrase that was probably in the newspaper and every place back at the time was that they were going to handle it internally. I think it is an example of the lack of transparency. It's one that I'm not surprised the opposition is uncomfortable with. Certainly, I would be uncomfortable with it – true – but it also doesn't change the fact that it's a matter of public record, and in this case it's a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Are there other submissions?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule on points of order 9 and 10. At the outset of the ruling I want to speak to the sensitivity of this issue. From time to time ruling on points of order of this nature becomes difficult because both sides of the Assembly have engaged in making these sorts of allegations. I know that members of the Official Opposition from time to time have raised similar sorts of allegations about certain members of the government, much to the chagrin and dissatisfaction of those members who have had those allegations handled in the past. The same goes for members of the government and the concern and consternation that it creates in members of the opposition when members of the government bring up allegations like were brought up today in question period.

3:10

One of my significant concerns, particularly from today and in the past two weeks, is when the Minister of Health has gone as far as to make an allegation that members, current members, should be calling the police and providing them with information, as if or implying that members of the Assembly are breaking the law by not providing police information. These are very serious allegations that are being made by the Minister of Health, as are the concerns that the Minister of Health raises. Both points are valid, but both points are sensitive in nature.

I am not going to require an apology from the minister today, but in the strongest possible ways I will provide a caution on this very, very sensitive issue. In particular, these situations often end in a tit-for-tat, where members of the opposition will raise similar allegations and vice versa, and we end up at the bottom of a negative spiral making these allegations. While I will provide the strongest caution to the minister, I hope that both sides will avoid these sorts of allegations in the future as they certainly do not raise the level of decorum inside the Assembly.

I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 57 Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2021

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Since tabling Bill 57, I've been hearing a lot of interpretations of the bill. Most of the details have been wrong, and some of them have been outright false. Now, I can understand about the details, but I do not understand deliberate attempts to undermine the benefits that this bill will bring to the Métis settlements.

In particular, there are three points that I've been hearing. While there are several more that I would like to touch on, we don't have the time to correct every single mistruth that has been put out there by the members opposite, so I'll stick to the top three. Madam Chair, today I'll touch on the factual errors: number 1, that there was no consultation; factual error number 2, that Métis settlements cannot fend for themselves financially; and number 3, I also want to address that the bill is being met with words like "paternalism,"

“colonialism,” and phrases like “betrayal of reconciliation.” To be honest, it upsets me because I know that this bill is the exact opposite. I want to put a stop to those notions today.

Madam Chair, the settlements themselves are culturally significant in Alberta and in all of Canada, but they have to be stable, sustainable, and have practices in place to be successful. Bill 57 responds to the desire of settlement members for greater self-governance, greater control, and more accountability. First, I’ll speak to an incorrect assumption about consultation and the phrase “duty to consult.” There has been some confusion from the other side of the House, and I’d like to clarify that there is a difference between consultation and engagement. The term “consultation” is very specific. It’s a technical process that relates to land and inherent treaty rights, and it’s triggered when a development project may adversely impact on those rights, so that phrase is completely inaccurate and misleading in the context of Bill 57.

When it comes to engagement, we did our due diligence, Madam Chair. I along with my department staff have made every effort to be open and transparent about the proposed amendments in Bill 57. Of course, the pandemic made everything more challenging. We have all had to be more creative and find ways to reach out and communicate with one another. We engaged the Metis Settlements General Council and settlement leadership over 19 times on high-level concepts and many of the proposed changes, changes I will get into shortly such as removing the minister’s veto power over the future fund and other outdated sections. Let me be clear. The plan was for settlement councils to engage their members about changes to the Metis Settlements Act, and I asked for member feedback.

Madam Chair, I was going to put a bill forward in the fall of 2020, but the settlement leaders asked for more time to engage with their members, so I did delay bringing it forward to give them that time. In addition, I also hosted a tele town hall on March 17. That was open to all Métis settlement members, and that was right after first reading so they could ask questions and I could clarify the intent behind the amendments.

Madam Chair, we want settlements here 100 years from now. The changes being proposed under Bill 57 will help ensure that Métis settlement members have self-government and greater financial control, and Bill 57 will deliver both of those.

This brings me to the next piece of misinformation that I’d like to clarify. Members on the other side have talked quite a bit about finances, governance, and have essentially said that the settlements are not able to fend for themselves. I want to be clear with that. Within each amendment there is more flexibility for the settlements to exercise. There’s more transparency for governance, greater self-sufficiency, and greater fiscal control and sustainability. These are the types of issues I’ve heard about from settlement members since I became minister.

Initially, Madam Chair, the bill stated that each settlement would have three councillors instead of the current five, but settlement leadership wanted more flexibility, so we changed it. We engaged, we listened, and we responded. Settlements can now elect between three and five councillors based on how many councillors they need and what their budgets can afford.

Finally, Madam Chair, I want to address the misconception and factual inaccuracies surrounding the terms the members opposite are throwing out there such as “paternalism.” It’s time for settlements to decide whether their financial decisions are right or wrong for them, and that’s why I’m removing the Minister of Indigenous Relations’ veto power over the future fund. To think this bill is rife with paternalism is simply not true and actually quite outrageous. It’s patronizing to think that settlements can’t take care of themselves. They can and most already are. Some have established successful businesses, and they have thriving revenues.

Changes to the act make sure that settlement councils have even more capacity to make their own government decisions without having to ask the province for permission. This is especially infuriating, Madam Chair. Stepping out of the way for people to have more of their own choice while expanding their decision-making powers: how is that paternalistic? How does making sure that Métis settlements have more power over their governance structure and their own operational budgets contribute to colonialism? The settlements have been around for over 90 years, and we want them to be around for another 90 beyond this. It’s wrong to underestimate the residents of the Métis settlements, thinking that they can only survive with provincial patronage. This bill spells a new era for the settlements and a new era for our relationship, one where Métis settlements are in the driver’s seat steering their own destiny, and Alberta’s government will be there as a partner on that journey.

Madam Chair, this bill gets government out of the way and makes room for the settlements to take control of their own destiny through self-governance, self-sufficiency, and financial autonomy. That is what the settlement members have asked me and told me that they wanted, and this is what Bill 57 delivers.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

3:20

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to address this. I’m glad we are in committee so that we can, hopefully, over the afternoon have a little bit of back-and-forth between myself and the minister. I just want you to know that I listened very carefully to your words just now, and I see that you are feeling upset about the language that’s been used to describe the bill. As such, I will endeavour to avoid such language because it’s not the point that I’m concerned about here. I’m not wishing to cast aspersions or frame either the minister or the government with derogatory language, but I think that it’s very important that in the House we understand why it is we’ve arrived at this particular situation that this kind of language is being used.

I assure you that when I get my almost daily phone calls from members of the settlements about this, the language they use is the language that the minister just reflected into the House. I will try not to use that language, but the government needs to be assured that that is the language that is being used by the people who are being affected by this act. It’s a context, and we’ll try to see if we can avoid some of that here in the House today to actually address the real issues that we would like to see dealt with by this government at this time.

Now, I know that the minister stood up and said that there are three areas of falsehood which he would like to correct, so I’d like to follow his lead and go through a little bit those three areas about some of the concerns that have been expressed to me by members of the Métis settlements. In fact, as I say that, I recognize that the minister has also said that they have heard from members of the Métis settlements, but I think part of the difference is that I’m hearing from the elected representatives as well as some individual members of the Métis settlements and that the elected members across all eight settlements have unanimously voted that they do not accept this act. It’s not like it’s a tit-for-tat here; I’ve got some people talking to me and the minister has some people talking to them. I’m in the position of listening to the voice of the duly elected members, some 40 members across eight settlements, who have unanimously declared that this act needs to stop now and have requested this House to act in such a way as to remove this bill from the House and spend time working with the Métis community.

When I was Minister of Indigenous Relations, I certainly did hear complaints from individual members on a regular basis. In fact, some became my best pen pals, constantly sending letters almost on a weekly basis. But I did not assume that the few members who were consistent in their vocalizations to me represented the overall thoughts and ideas of the members of the settlements. Instead, I went and worked with the Métis Settlements General Council to understand the issues and met with individual members in the communities until I got a sense of the overwhelming direction that the settlements were going in. That's what we're talking about here.

Now, the first thing that the minister talked about was that it's been falsely stated that there's been no consultation. What the minister is doing, however, is that he's taking a very pedantic view of the word "consultation." In other words, he understands that there is a legal meaning that can be ascribed to the word "consultation." He is identifying that in this particular case it does not fit the definition of consultation, which is under section 35, with regard to land and indigenous rights. I accept that on some level. That I could even argue a little bit.

However, there's also a normal, everyday usage of the word "consultation" by people around the world, including the Métis people themselves, that consultation doesn't necessarily just mean the actual official process with legal implications for the consultation of land use. It also means discussing with people matters which affect them and their lives. They are using the word in a colloquial sense when they talk about consultation. The reason why they use that word and not the word that the minister has been choosing to use today, "engagement," is that they're trying to advance the distinction between a process which they would colloquially perceive to be consultation and the issue of engagement because they know that the minister is saying that there have been some 19 – I think that is the number that's been repeated – contacts with the Métis settlement communities.

Now, I have as recently as a day or so ago received yet another contact from an official elected person on one of the settlements saying: you know, I was physically present when some of those engagements occurred, and I can tell you that they do not fit the definition of consultation, the colloquial definition of consultation, that they are seeking. What they experienced was that the minister had made decisions prior to coming to them about what was going to be happening with this bill. At no time was there a chance for the membership to be consulted to actually make a decision as to whether or not the Métis settlements could either find a way to agree with the minister or to work with the minister to make changes necessary. Where we're at here is that the minister is defending himself on a very narrow, razor-edge use of language whereas the community members are talking about the relationship and the nature of the relationship between themselves and the minister. What they're saying is that this does not feel like we were sitting at a table engaged in a working relationship with the minister to come to a mutually agreeable result.

Now, we know that that didn't happen because we have a unanimous vote by the Métis Settlements General Council to reject this bill. We've had the president of the Métis Settlements General Council come and speak at length here at the Federal Building about the fact that they want this bill removed. Now, you can say, "We talked to these people before," or whatever you want, but the fact is that you have arrived at a place where it is clear that the people who are going to be affected by this, in an overwhelming majority, are very upset about what is happening and do not feel like they were a part of an appropriate process and are asking to be re-engaged in an appropriate conversation. So that's the first point that I think that the minister needs to understand. You can define it any way you

want, but the reality is that people are hurting and they're telling you they're hurting and they want something to change.

Now, they also have some particular points about the issue of the consultation. They don't only talk about consultation with the minister, the colloquial definition of it, of course, but they talk about consultation with the Métis membership. In the fall, when the minister wanted to bring in this – and he did delay it from the fall until now. I respect that he chose to do that. The reason for that delay was so that there would be an opportunity for consultation with the membership.

Now, the minister is saying: I gave them three or four months; they should have done that. But he's not acknowledging that this has occurred in the middle of the largest epidemic and pandemic that we have experienced in Alberta perhaps in our history and that because of that, the ability for the communities to engage in their normal, traditional practice of gathering the membership together, providing them information about the bill and where things are going, seeking their input, coming to a decision on how they would like to respond as a community to that, and then offering that back to the minister was impossible because of the health regulations that prevented them from gathering together to do that.

3:30

Now, I understand that the minister is saying that there are other ways, and he did in his address say that that there are other ways to speak to people. But he also must recognize that those other ways are not fully possible for many members of the Métis communities. It's not like in some of these communities that Internet access is readily available. It's not like we can be assured that membership are likely to even have a computer or some other way to access something. I think that that's very important, that we also understand that it is inconsistent with their traditional practice. It would have been something completely new for them, to go completely online in order to do the consultation, nothing with which they had any experience and which does not fit how they define themselves. So we have a situation where they are feeling that all they are asking to do is to take these kinds of things that come forward, to go to their membership, and to actually work with the membership in the process that they would like to do.

Now, if he's saying that the whole intent of this bill is to allow the Métis people more governance, then why is he denying them the chance to actually express that governance in the way that they would like to do it? He's now saying to them: "We want you to have more freedom in governance but not in the way you want to do it, only in the way I want it done. If you don't do it the way I want it done, then too bad. I'm going ahead with the bill anyways." That's the contradiction that is experienced by the Métis people at this time. They're being told they're being given more freedom, but if they try to exercise that freedom, they're punished by being told: too late, I'm going ahead with this anyways. That's a very deep concern.

I know that the minister indicated that a town hall was held on March 17, but it was a very limited town hall, one hour in which the minister and one of the other MLAs spent more than 50 per cent of the time talking to each other, took in only a few questions from a very select number of people, and excluded most of the leadership of the Métis settlements from being able to ask a question. Nobody left that feeling like they had had an opportunity to engage in an appropriate conversation with the minister. It was certainly a tick-off-the-checkbox kind of activity, not an engagement which left the people who are being affected by this bill feeling that they had indeed been part of an appropriate process to express themselves moving forward.

I'm not wanting to condemn the minister. I'm wanting the minister to understand the experience of the Métis people in this whole situation and how they are trying to get it across that they actually want a relationship with this minister in which they work together to resolve the problems. They're not rejecting the bill out of hand. They're saying, "Come to us. Establish and work through a process which will allow us to come to a mutual conclusion," which seems a respectful thing to do if you do in fact believe that they should have the power of governance over their own community. I just, you know, want to bring that little piece to a conclusion. I think that it's important that that be on the table. When we talk about the reason why the opposition wants this withdrawn, it's because we are trying to reflect the lived experience of the Métis people and what both their official representatives and their membership are constantly telling us on a regular basis.

The second point – and I'm sure I'm going to run out of time before I get through all of these points, so I will use the opportunity of Committee of the Whole to address some of them further if I do run out of time – is the issue that somehow the opposition is saying that the Métis people are not able to fend financially for themselves. Now, I want it to be very clear. We certainly would like to see the Métis people be able to do the things that they need to do and be able to financially afford to do all of those kinds of things, but it isn't really the only question that we have here with regard to this bill, whether or not they have money.

We know, first of all, that given a history of mistreatment of the Métis people in this province, where, in fact, they were a road concession people, they were referred to for many – literally had nowhere to live, so they would live on the edge of a highway, where it was nobody's private property, but the government wasn't prepared to actually move them off because there was nowhere to move them to. Road concession people: no place to call home for many years. How do you expect them to have reached a level of financial success that is necessary to run an independent government on its own resources given that extensive history of marginalization? When you go to the Métis settlements, you will find very quickly that, yes, indeed there are some very successful individuals. Yes, the communities have been working very hard to build up their own resources, but they have not arrived at a place of being able to completely finance a government.

Now, that's a debatable piece. I get that. We can certainly go over that in detail, and I certainly will attempt to do so when I have a bit more time. But the underlying issue here is a question of: do you believe that the Métis people are indigenous people under section 35 of the Constitution? Yes or no? That's the fundamental question with regard to the finances here because if you believe that they are indigenous people under section 35 of the Constitution, then you recognize that Canada has a historical financial responsibility in their relationship with the Métis people; that is, they had an *a priori* claim to the land in the province of Alberta prior to the establishment of the province of Alberta and as such have a claim to the benefits of the land which was taken away from them. That benefit typically, in our modern day, is the extraction of resources: oil and gas, forestry, and so on.

What they are saying is: because we had that prior claim and because we are recognized as indigenous people under section 35 of the Constitution, we should have a relationship where some of the benefits of those resource extractions naturally flow to the governments of the Métis people, not because it's a gift of the province of Alberta but because it is their due right under section 35. If you're saying that they should no longer receive any financial support from the provincial government, you are essentially denying their section 35 status, and if you are denying their section 35 status, you are essentially saying that these are not indigenous

people, which is an incredible claim for this government to make and one that, I think, needs to be corrected at this time. I certainly would love to see the government go back and look at the financial relationship and financial responsibility that comes from the prior possession of the land before white settlement and before the establishment of the province of Alberta. That's what they're saying.

Nobody is saying: just keep throwing money at us. What they're saying is: if we are a government, then we should naturally have the benefits of the resource extraction in the territory which is ours. That is what the government needs to take a look at. They need to look at whether or not there needs to be an ongoing, consistent relationship between our resource extraction of the land that belonged to the Métis people and the ongoing use of the revenues from those resources to provide for the underlying functioning of their government exactly as it is for the province of Alberta. We rely on those same things to run our government. We rely on the resource extraction from oil and gas and forestry and so on in order to run the government that we are part of right here.

They're not asking for something new or different or special. They're simply asking to be recognized as the government of the Métis people and that that is in part defined by their section 35 rights, which means that the benefits that flow from the land need to flow in proportion to the people of the Métis settlements. That's it. That's what they're asking for. I think it's at least worth a conversation. I think something that's as fundamental as rights which existed prior to the existence of the province of Alberta deserves more than a three or four month delay of a bill which they're ultimately completely opposed to.

I want to go on and talk a little bit about the fact that the minister has made a decision to move the government out of the LTA in a number of ways, and it's actually – some of this is stuff that I may support. I'm not absolutely against the notion that the minister extracts himself. In fact, when I was minister, I was already in a process to begin to move some of these things forward.

3:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today in support of the proposed amendments to the Metis Settlements Act, or MSA. I'd also like to thank the Minister of Indigenous Relations and his office for their hard work in putting together this groundbreaking legislation. Bill 57, or the Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2021, is something I believe will make positive and long-lasting differences in the lives of settlement residents.

Madam Chair, members of the Métis settlements have called for change. They have called for increased effectiveness and autonomy. They have also demonstrated a desire for better fiscal accountability and more transparency in settlement governance. The Ministry of Indigenous Relations seeks to provide these changes through updates to the Metis Settlements Act, which is a 30-year-old piece of legislation. My colleagues and I believe that it is time to implement meaningful change to support a long, prosperous, and self-governing future for the Métis settlements.

It is apparent from the content of this bill that our government can make the legislation more flexible for Métis settlement councils to create a sustainable future for generations to come. Madam Chair, since the early 20th century Métis communities and the Alberta government have worked together to create multiple frameworks in which the Métis could maintain their culture and independence with their own land base. The eventual result was the Métis settlements, which have given people the opportunity for self-governance, self-sufficiency, and the chance for practical traditional land use.

I am pleased to talk about this today because the Minister of Indigenous Relations brought forward a bill that would ensure that this is possible. Alberta's government has engaged with settlement councils and the Metis Settlements General Council, the MSGC, during the last year about updating the Metis Settlements Act. Madam Chair, I am pleased to see what the Minister of Indigenous Relations has achieved through these engagements. I believe that there were approximately 20 interactions that helped shape this amendment to the legislation.

Increased accountability and financial transparency. For example, members often call for increased sustainability and accountability within their own government. I know that the minister has heard that there is a need for greater transparency of financial disclosures, and the proposed changes under Bill 57 will ensure that there is more accountability. For example, an amendment calls for councils to post plain-language financial documents that all members can access. Members want to know how settlement dollars are being used, and this bill delivers on that. Madam Chair, this bill strengthens the Métis settlements' governance and accountability and contributes to a long-term sustainability of settlement communities.

Alberta's government entered into a long-term governance and funding agreement, LTA, in 2013 to provide \$85 million to the settlements over 10 years, and the LTA comes to an end on March 31, 2023. Alberta's government wants to ensure that the eight Métis settlements have the ability to generate more revenue sources. With the LTA set to expire in 2023, making these changes now gives the settlements time to make a smooth transition.

Another reason this bill comes at a good time is that the legislation is working within an established framework, the original Metis Settlements Act, which is 30 years old. We should not wait any longer to modernize this legislation. Madam Chair, the Métis settlements council elections take place on October 4 of this year. This gives us time to help the settlements make a smooth transition to the new changes.

Madam Chair, this legislation also removes the Minister of Indigenous Relations from financial decisions about administering the future fund. Under the existing legislation the minister had veto power over the fund. If passed, Bill 57 will remove that power, clearing the way for decisions to stay within the Métis settlements instead of being made by Alberta's government. Alberta's government wants Métis settlements to succeed financially and to reach the self-governance they have wanted as land-based communities.

The path to success starts by Alberta's government stepping out of their way, encouraging members to contribute more to the cost of governance and operations, and having councils that are more accountable for collecting fees for essential services. Madam Chair, the Minister of Indigenous Relations has been clear that this is not a heavy-handed approach. Councils do not have to collect service fees. This legislation simply gives them the ability to collect fees for essential services if that's what they determine to be the right course of action for them. This legislation creates the flexibility the settlements have asked for.

Métis settlements also qualify for municipal grants. They're also able to apply for funds specially designed for indigenous communities. This includes the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, for investment in large-scale, natural resource development projects, and the indigenous business investment fund.

About the self-governance, furthermore, as I have mentioned, settlement members themselves see the need for change, and they want the provincial government to prioritize sustainability and self-governance. Métis settlement members deserve legislation that supports their self-governance. Madam Chair, this is enabling legislation. They have worked tirelessly for generations to create strong, unique communities where people can practise traditional

uses of the land. Alberta's heritage is filled with Métis accomplishment and excellence. We want to recognize these contributions. We also want the Métis settlements to succeed on the path of self-governance and financial sustainability.

Bill 57 will ensure just that. Alberta's government is updating this legislation to make sure it's flexible enough for Métis settlement councils to make those decisions for themselves without interference from the provincial government, essentially allowing them to control their own destiny. This legislation will support the Métis settlements into the future to ensure they are sustainable.

Madam Chair, I support the call for change, and I support this legislation's office. The continued success of the Métis settlements is just as important to other members as it is to our province, which would not be the same without the contributions of these eight unique settlements. Bill 57 will ensure that they have the tools they need to succeed for generations to come.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak on this piece of legislation as I have a Métis settlement in my constituency, the great Métis settlement of Paddle Prairie, its wonderful people, and I've recently been getting to know other Métis settlements in the area as well, including those at Gift Lake and Peavine.

I think it's important that we start this conversation with an understanding of Métis culture. I think the people and the settlements, fundamentally, are based on the culture, and the culture they've inherited is a fascinating one, Madam Chair. It has one foot in both worlds, one foot in the First Nation communities of our province and of our country, with antiquity, going back, as the member opposite mentioned, long before this province arrived. They have another foot in the western world, and there's a merging of two cultures together. I think it is a wonderful expression of how our province and our culture can work with communities of different ethnic backgrounds, of different values, of different interests.

3:50

But the culture is a lively one, Madam Chair. The culture is partially based on its language – French, English, and Cree – largely but not exclusively. It's based on a way of living, an ability to fend for themselves. Self-determination, self-reliance are incredibly important. You see it manifest in the Métis people. Whatever settlement you go to, whether you're talking about the settlements or the nation, you find a sense of self-reliance, that they show, and it cannot hide itself. I know that ever since I was a child, I've had a warm fondness for Métis culture. A friend of mine was a jigger and would often wear his red sash and jig, and I would go sometimes to some of his jiggering competitions. To see the animation, the excitement in the people putting on display their beautiful culture, I think is so very important to understand the larger context of what's going on.

I think that along with that self-reliance and independence and the determination that they have for who they are and where they want to go as a people there come other values, an entrepreneurialism that we saw in the Métis people, that drove the Métis people in the first place, the fur trade initially, that settled much of our province today. I have in my constituency the community of Fort Vermilion, which is the oldest continuously inhabited community in the province of Alberta. It was largely fur traders and Métis to this day that live and animate that community. It's a beautiful community. If you haven't been there, I highly suggest it.

I think it's important to understand that the settlements are people that come from this tradition, that come from this culture. Their governments come from this hybrid of two worlds meeting, and it's not lost on them today. In many ways they feel like they get the brunt of it from all sides. I see it differently. I see that they have the benefit of all sides, Madam Chair.

I think that it is true, what the minister says about the Métis people, and what is important in this act above all else is that these individuals are capable individuals. These communities are communities like any other in rural Alberta in the sense that they have a sense of identity and belonging to a place, to that settlement, that location. They manifest that in ways that I am very envious of, even in my own community, where I live. I see a sense of belonging in Paddle Prairie, and they know that they belong there. They know they're connected to their land. I think that is fundamentally a very Albertan value, connection to that land. It's inherent to who the Métis people are on the settlements. That's why there's passion.

There will be, of course, dissenting voices and different views as the minister brings forward what is important modernization. Of course, there will be, Madam Chair. I'm not surprised at all that members opposite hear some frustrations and questions. I suggest we work with them, and that's what I try and do. I'm responsible for the Métis settlements within my own constituency, and I think particularly of Paddle Prairie and working with that council diligently as often as possible. I just had the chair text me the other day saying that he was reading *Hansard*. I thought: my gosh, this is a constituent for me, a Métis chair that reads *Hansard* in his spare time. He's after my own heart. I've worked with Alden, the current chair, as I've worked with the past chairs. Mr. Calliou – God rest his soul – we know passed away just over a year ago now, I believe.

I work with the council and the chair, and some of the particular concrete issues they brought up were really valuable for me. They did help inform my ability to go to the minister and have a conversation. It was helpful to understand that even though the minister has had, I think, 19 points of engagement and lots and lots of time spent with the Métis general council, that council didn't necessarily have a translation into consulting and engaging with those eight constituent settlements. Speaking directly with the council and the chair has been helpful, particularly around some questions that they have uniquely enacted under section 10 of the act, that I've brought to the minister, and we're going to be able to see, I think, some positive change because of that positive engagement.

The reason I bring this up, Madam Chair, is because the kinds of issues that I hear from the engaged members on these settlements are not allegations of sort of condescending paternalism. Instead, they're concrete, particular issues, that members who have a responsibility and an accountability to their settlements want to solve. It's not pie-in-the-sky abstractions. They really have detailed, precise questions. I find that helpful. I can take that. I can work with that, and I have worked with that with Paddle Prairie, and I'm excited to hear the minister later on try and accommodate some of those concerns that they have, and it's because of that positive collaboration.

Now, the items that this particular piece of legislation brings forward are things that I think not just Métis settlements want but all of us want, financial accountability and transparency. I don't hear anyone arguing against that. And the particular items in here that bring that, I think, are helpful. For example, the minister mentioned removing the minister's veto out of looking at the future fund and how that operates. That's a good thing. That gives more flexibility. There are other issues surrounding the option of going from three to five councillors. That's flexibility. I mean, I know that there is division on some of these councils and in the wider

communities on whether or not they should have three or five, whether they need that many councillors. That should be a local decision for them to make. That kind of flexibility is good. These are things that I see that are positive.

I reiterate: yeah, there will be divisions. We see that in all politics. What I find when I go and speak is a willingness to engage. I know that I go to the council chambers regularly at Paddle Prairie, and if I don't come prepared, I promise you that I'm licking my wounds when I walk out of there, Madam Chair. They are hard on me in a good way, in a fair way, but the whole time they're not looking for cheap shots; they're looking for genuine engagement. Sometimes I bring a tough message, and they'll listen to it, and they'll hear it if it's fair and reasoned. Sometimes they'll say: I changed my mind. Sometimes they'll say that they continue to disagree. Fundamentally, what they're looking for is genuine engagement, and that's what I've found so far in this.

Frustrations that we might have with individual members of the Métis general council – I know that I've had a lot of local members reflect frustrations with how it's been handled by certain members of the general council. That being said, the local members that I speak to, whether it be council, elected representatives, or rank-and-file settlement members, residents, want to find some sort of accommodation. They understand that we're going to have difficulties working between some of these issues, working through them, but they're happy to see that we're engaging. They're happy to see that there's a response there, and I think that's particularly true because of the very positive approach that we've taken with Paddle Prairie, which I'm very, very proud of.

As I said before, I grew up with a deep affinity for the Métis culture because of a close friend of mine who was a jigger and introduced it to me in a wonderful way. I understand that Métis settlements have been around for nearly a century, and I expect centuries more to come, and that question of sustainability is really key. Really, it is. Again, I think it's born out of a need for preserving the important way of life and culture that the Métis communities today have inherited from generations past. I think that's a good thing. That speaks to an Albertan value of continuity with our history and our past, of where we come from and reflecting on what that is. What I don't want to have is problems with logistical sustainability and governance and transparency lead to frustrations, lead to a difficulty in maintaining that sustainability.

The Métis settlements are partners with this province. They were created by a statute of this province. We're the only province to have land Métis settlements, where land is designated for that. It doesn't exist anywhere else. It is absolutely out of line for anyone to imply that this government or this province doesn't care about its Métis people; we absolutely do. It has been a storied history with ups and, yes, downs, Madam Chair. I see more ups to come, but we're going to have to work as partners, back and forth. It's not a one-way street, and I think that's some of the point that these Métis settlements have been making.

That's why I'm happy to engage with the minister to find these accommodations in the legislation to maintain some of the unique situations that we have in Paddle Prairie, enacted under section 10, but it's not a one-way street the other way either. We are a partner, as the province, with these settlements. We need to find something that we believe we can work with them on that's sustainable. I think giving them more flexibility in how they make their decisions is good, Madam Chair. We've seen that demonstrated with my local settlement council. With the flexibility they have had, they've taken advantage of it. I see this as an opportunity for them to take advantage of more opportunities in how they govern. I have every confidence that if we put transparent, accountable, sustainable infrastructure in for the governance, the Métis nations and the Métis

people on the settlements will be able to sort this out, for them to make their own decisions.

4:00

I do not want it to be a situation where we're looking at individual moments of intervention between the government and the Métis settlements. I think the best situation is sustainable, autonomous communities that are able to work for themselves, sustain themselves. I think that's what we've seen up to now. There is an incredible wellspring of entrepreneurialism.

I can tell you stories about when I went to Peavine and the work that that community has done to bring innovative solutions, to try and bring work, jobs, revenue onto their settlement. A very interesting aspect: they're not just looking at finding work just in the moment in Peavine. I can tell you right now that they have, I think, something like 26 – and I stand to be corrected on that number – members of their community that they're helping pay for the education of off-settlement, and those community members, more often than not, do come back. They're investing in the future through education. They're doing that through revenue they've raised through entrepreneurial means. I think that's exciting, Madam Chair. They have that opportunity because they've had the choice of how they govern themselves in terms of choices of how they invest and where they get their revenue. This kind of legislation only further enables these communities to make those decisions.

Now, I'm happy to say that I will advocate on behalf of my constituents and on behalf of Paddle Prairie, and that's why I work with them on particular issues that they have problems with and trying to solve those problems. I try and engage with them as honestly as I can and say nothing but the truth so that they know that when I come to them, I'm going to speak honestly to them, and they can expect that from me. That's why, when I worked with them, with Paddle Prairie, on this question surrounding section 10, I brought that to the minister. I brought other concerns to the minister as well. I'm very happy to say that they've had good results from that. I've even committed to my Métis settlement that we're going to have another meeting with the minister to talk about any other concerns that they have and see if we can work through some of these issues.

It's not always going to be easy in these partnerships, Madam Chair, but they're important partnerships to preserve. I will not simply throw the baby out with the bathwater. I will not simply have a view where I dismiss the importance of a working relationship with them. It is incredibly important for us as a province, as a Legislature here, and the minister on behalf of government to cooperatively work with them. There will be difficult conversations had but important conversations had, and I value very much the work that the minister has done in an attempt to reach out, an attempt to engage, an attempt to bring forward more opportunities and flexibility for these settlements to make decisions for themselves.

With that, Madam Chair, I am excited to engage in debate and look forward to more conversation from the minister and members opposite. But, no, on behalf of my constituents I'm happy to bring forward any issues that I can that will help create better legislation for this province and particularly for the Métis settlements.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to continue this conversation, and I appreciate the tone of the conversation because I really do want this to be a respectful conversation. It is so important that we actually address the issues

at hand, and I appreciate the sentiments of the speaker, the MLA for Peace River, talking about the Métis people in respectful terms and their history in those terms and really making my argument for me in many ways in that the previous speaker did spend a significant amount of time talking about the need to have a partnership and within that partnership to find accommodations, to come to a mutual agreement. All of those phrases were used by the Member for Peace River.

My very point of my first speech was that the Métis settlements have unanimously voted to stop this bill until they have a chance to engage in exactly what the Member for Peace River is now saying they would like to engage in. Your very partner is telling you that the way to do that is to actually stop this process and go into that other process, which apparently is supported by the Member for Peace River but not supported, apparently, by the minister. I guess I find myself in a difficult position here because we seem to have two contradictory attitudes toward this process from members of the government side of the House, and I'm very concerned about where we're at.

I certainly believe that there is a better way forward and that the minister has an opportunity, if the minister were to take the chance to use that opportunity, to move in an appropriate direction. You know, it has long been said that to get a unanimous vote from the members of the settlements on anything at all is like chasing unicorns. It never happens. For the first time that I've ever known, it has happened. They gave a unanimous vote, which brings me around to some of the other issues that have been talked about here.

Now, as I was saying earlier, when I was minister, we certainly were concerned about some of the underlying same issues, and that is that we certainly want the communities to be in a viable, sustainable position as soon as possible. As part of that work, we requested from the settlements a number of processes to establish protocols and bylaws and so on that would allow them to be ready to completely self-govern at an appropriate time. Of course, we weren't in government long enough to ensure that that had come to an ultimate conclusion. I would certainly love to hear from the minister why the process of actually getting them ready, from a government's point of view, was not pursued, which is what we were doing. We were ensuring that they, in fact, had all of the pieces of governance in place so that they could take over.

Instead of building and ensuring that the governance structure was in place and ensuring that the bylaws and conditions for self-government were there, the minister has simply said: "Well, I'm just withdrawing from this process. Good luck. Too bad if you don't have everything in place in order to be able to take over." I don't understand why they would do that when there was indeed a process that was set in place to begin to make some transitions that, I think, ultimately are necessary but need to be done in a way that is going to ensure success.

The fear from the Métis community is this, and I'll just lay it out. You know, I'd love the minister to respond to this because this is what I'm hearing time and time again. They are afraid that the intent here is for the government to back up, withdraw, to take out all the supports that the Métis settlements have been living with over the last number of years. They are afraid that the government is hoping that they will then ultimately fail in governance, financially or in some other governance way, and that there will be an excuse to actually intervene and to remove governance from the Métis people. That's their fear. That's what gets repeated to me all the time.

Somehow they believe that they're not being respected as a self-government but that there is a hope that ultimately they will fail in the mechanisms that are in place right now and therefore be reduced to, essentially, some kind of specialized municipality, language that

I heard repeated from the Member for Calgary-East just recently in this House. They would be viewed in some ways as a municipality being able to apply for municipal funds. That is exactly what terrorizes the Métis community. I would certainly love to have the minister speak to that fact and to really be clear with the Métis people. Are they just some kind of specialized municipality, or are they an indigenous government? There's a huge distinction between those two. The minister's clarity on that would certainly be helpful.

4:10

Now, there are a number of other issues here that I think need to be spoken to. I've been very concerned about some of the statements that have been made about transparency and so on on the Métis settlements. I really think that before people get up and say that there has been no transparency, which is essentially the argument that has been made by a number of the MLAs from the government side of the House, they go back and look at the laws and the bylaws that currently exist on Métis settlements and the fact that they have a very transparent process of making decisions about their finances and having those finances audited on a regular basis – I know I've certainly read a number of those audits – and sharing those outcomes with the people in the communities.

Now, of course, there are individual members on the settlements that say, "This government isn't transparent and doesn't tell us how they spend their money," but I can certainly find hundreds, thousands, perhaps a million Albertans who would say the same thing about the provincial government. It doesn't mean that the laws aren't in place to actually allow transparency already. Now, I'm completely in favour of transparency, and so is the Metis Settlements General Council, as far as I understand, so if there were some things that needed to be changed, I certainly would think that sitting down and actually working with them to put in the bylaws, as in the process that I had previously initiated to share that, would be perfectly appropriate rather than dictating it from the government.

Are they a self-government or not? If they're a self-government, then you ask them to put out the bylaws that show transparency, and you have them do it. If they're not an independent government, then you do it, which seems to be what the minister has decided: they're not an independent government, so we're going to do it for them. It just doesn't make sense, and I'm not even sure it's completely necessary in the way that it's been described although I always think a conversation about transparency is very appropriate, and I certainly support the minister engaging with the Métis communities on that kind of transparency.

One of the things that I'm concerned about has been mentioned a number of times by, basically, every speaker from the government side in the last hour. The minister is actually removing the ministerial right to a veto over finances. I understand that that is what's happening, and it is, in fact, one of the things that I would have supported moving forward here if the minister hadn't also put a poison pill in the middle of this bill. The poison pill is that he has indicated that while he is removing a veto power from the minister with regard to the expenses, he has put in the poison pill of saying that there must be unanimous consent of all eight settlements before any money is spent.

So you've certainly taken one form of veto power out and instituted a different kind of veto power. What government in the world has unanimous consent for every bit of spending that they engage in? Where in the world does that happen in any kind of democracy? Does this government believe it has unanimous consent of this House for their budget? If they do, they certainly have not been paying attention to what's happened on this side of the House in terms of our comments about this budget or looked at

the recorded votes of how often we have voted against this government. You as a government do not have unanimous consent of this House; therefore, you should not be able to spend money. That's the standard that you've set up.

Now, of course, there were laws about spending money from the LTA and the future fund in the Métis settlements, but they were the normal laws of a democracy that a majority of the settlements – that is, a minimum of five out of eight settlements – needed to vote in favour of any particular financial decision, which is the standard of democracy around the world. Why would you tell the Métis people: we want you to be self-governing, but we're going to tell you how to govern, and we're going to make it a form of government which is not consistent with democracy? It just doesn't make sense. It's very concerning that you would stick that poison pill in the middle of this bill. It tells me again that the Métis people are very concerned that what you're seeking is failure. You're seeking them to be unable to move forward because they can't achieve unanimity, and I think that that's very disconcerting.

There's also another problem that's been put into this bill, and it's been touted twice at least, that I heard already this afternoon, by the government, and that is that they want to reduce the number of councillors from five to three in order to save money, with less money spent on councillors because of the number of people they represent. Now, there are some inherent problems with that in that councillors on Métis settlements do much more than many other places because they live so close with the people they are responsible for. They respond often on a 24-hour basis to the concerns and issues of the Métis people, so there are reasons why it got created at a level of five councillors per settlement.

Now, I recognize that that is not written in stone, that that is not ultimately, you know, the right number barring any other argument. There indeed may be an argument that three councillors is appropriate. As such, I would hope that the minister would go back to the councils and say: look, this is an issue of you spending too much money on your governance structure, and we really need to see that reduced. That's a reasonable conversation to enter into with the Métis settlements. But, again, if you believe that the settlements are indeed supposed to be self-governing, then you don't impose that on them; you have the conversation with them, and then you respect the decisions that they make. That's not what's happened here.

In fact, they've done the worst of all worlds. They have said neither that they're going to reduce down to three nor that they're going to maintain the five but that they're going to allow an arbitrary decision between the two. Some settlements may choose to go with three. In fact, three will be imposed under this act if they don't make a decision and don't create a bylaw to insist on five. So now we have another problem. Now we have the potential for settlements to have three coming from some of the settlements – let's say that four of them choose to go that route – and five councillors from four other settlements, which means that when the Metis Settlements General Council gathers together, four of the settlements will have more votes in the decision-making than the other four settlements. So you've taken equity and equality out of the system.

Now you're in a position where those councils who oppose the government, who shake their finger at the government, will actually have more authority and be able to outvote the ones that actually are working with the government on this reduction: the worst of all possible worlds. And we know that with the Metis Settlements General Council there is often a division between, particularly, the four western settlements and the four eastern settlements. We know that that division is there, and now you've set up a circumstance where they actually won't even be equal at the table. Instead of

having 40 members vote on things, you may have 30 members vote on things, overrepresenting half the councils and underrepresenting half the councils. This is a recipe for disaster.

It would almost have been better if the government had simply said: “No, we’re going to three. That’s it. We’re going to ignore your right to self-government. We’re going to impose three because we want you to save money, and we think that we have the right to impose that kind of philosophy on you.” At least then they would have preserved the equality that exists between the settlements, and now we don’t have that. Because this government, you know, couldn’t go hot and couldn’t go cold, they ended up lukewarm, and we certainly know that that is not satisfying from either perspective. I really wish that the government would reconsider that particular piece of this bill and move in a direction – at the very least I’m saying that all the settlements have to go either three or five so that it’s consistent with the other aspects of the bill and not leave them in this particular place.

I also just want to talk about the fact that it’s been mentioned on a number of occasions that what’s motivating this is the end of the long-term agreement, the LTA. As I’ve mentioned before in this House, for some reason the government assumes that the coming of the end of the signed contract means that no new contract can be signed, as if the end of the LTA is the end of the universe, that there is no opportunity to go back and say: the LTA has been functioning in a particular way and has provided some particular benefits for all of Alberta, including the Métis settlements, and we could actually continue to have an LTA by re-signing a new one.

4:20

That’s never been offered as an option from this government. They’ve never gone to the Métis settlements and said: the long-term agreement can continue to be long term; we can continue to have an LTA, and we will now negotiate what it will look like for the next 10 years. Again, put another 10-year limit on it, and then say at the end of those 10 years, “We will again look at the LTA,” not with the intention of finalizing it and guillotining it at that particular time but examining it for its functionality and introducing pieces into the LTA that would increase its support for sustainability and vibrancy in these communities. That’s actually a possibility, Minister.

I would love to see this government sit down and actually renegotiate, just like every other Conservative government has ever done in this province. I don’t know why this Conservative government is different than all the rest. I mean, let’s just be very clear. The very existence of Métis settlements is really based on the Conservative politics in this province. Boy, I’ll tell you that I sure don’t give you credit, the other side of the House, for a lot of things, but hear me now: I am giving credit to the Conservative governments over the years for having been bold in the past, for creating the only Métis land base settlements in all of the country, and for sustaining most of those. Many people may not recognize that originally there were 12 settlements, and four of them were taken away. Unfortunately, there are some big issues around that, too, because, you know, it was done without due process, and it’s probably a legitimate historical complaint by the Métis people.

What I’m asking here is that the government sit down with the Métis people and actually correct some of these problems and stop saying to them, “This is what you’re asking for” when they clearly are telling you they’re not asking for it. They’ve unanimously supported a resolution that they do not support it. So stop telling them what they think when they’re telling you they don’t think that. It is very problematic and something I certainly wish the minister would stop doing and stop encouraging his MLAs to do. I mean, if you’re going to impose something on people, at least have the

strength to stand by your beliefs and not pretend you’re doing something that you’re not in fact doing.

I mean, I certainly have a lot more that I want to talk about in this process. I certainly do support the settlements getting to a place of financial security and so on.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It’s a good debate so far. I want to thank our members for their input and for getting out there and speaking with the members of the settlements and their communities.

I just want to respond to a few points, Madam Chair. I was curious to see that the member opposite did admit that there was concern when he was minister but that he failed to act on it. But I will not because I want them to be successful. We’re protecting their land base, the Métis culture, and the self-governance of their settlements. We have no intention of turning them into regular municipalities. The Métis land, their culture, their identity remain essential features of the Métis settlements. And when it comes to unanimous consent, the only unanimous consent is for the future fund. It’s all their money. They should each have a say in how it’s spent.

The three to five councillors, Madam Chair: that’s their option. We’re giving them the flexibility to do that. Some settlements have as few as 500 people. They may choose not to have five councillors to save some money. We left them the option, their self-governance option.

An Hon. Member: That’s reasonable.

Mr. Wilson: I thought it was reasonable.

It’s covered off in section 220 of the act, where it says: each settlement council present at the general assembly has one vote. So that’s already taken care of, Madam Chair.

Also, when it comes to section 35, we support that. That’s unquestioned. But this isn’t about section 35. It’s about community sustainability and accountability and improving on their self-governance. It’s not the place of the Metis Settlements Act to define the Canadian Constitution. We could not agree more that the settlements can and should exercise self-governance. They have been for over 30 years now.

The changes to the act that we’re making are for the settlement councils to have even more capacity to make their own governance decisions without having to ask the province for permission. Recognized section 35 rights: that’s for hunting, trapping, fishing for food, and we recognize this. But Bill 57 is about improving on financial sustainability and community political accountability and giving them more control over their financial affairs by removing the minister from some of those decisions.

Madam Chair, I continue to listen to the settlements, and we will continue to listen to their needs for self-governance and democracy. That’s why I’d like to move an amendment to Bill 57, restoring section 10 from the Metis Settlements Act. This section makes sure the settlements . . .

The Chair: Sorry, hon. minister. Please just wait until I have a copy.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. minister, please proceed.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Chair. This section makes sure that settlements that want to establish a bylaw for members to elect a chair can do so.

Madam Chair, if you'd like, I'll read it. It's a very short amendment. This bill is amended as follows. Sections 5 and 6 are struck out, and the following is substituted:

5 Section 10(6) is amended by striking out "3 councillors" and substituting "the number of councillors that constitute a quorum".

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment . . .

Ms Gray: Oh, no. Apologies. I was slow to get to my feet.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you so much. I am reviewing the amendment to Bill 57 that has just been introduced, and it is striking out "3 councillors" and substituting "the number of councillors that constitute a quorum." I just hope the minister might be able to outline if he knows what size a quorum would be most often given this change. So rather than three, would it still roughly average three most often, or might it be much bigger, much smaller? I'll just enter that question into debate.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on amendment A1? The hon. Justice minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 57.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 61 Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2021

The Chair: I see the hon. Minister of Service Alberta rising.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm very pleased that we're moving forward on debate of this legislation now at the committee stage. This bill is such an important bill that will protect Albertan families and provide them with greater peace of mind. For those who may be just joining us, as a refresher, this is the bill that will ensure that convicted dangerous offenders and long-term offenders and high-risk offenders in Alberta will never be able to change their names, never be able to hide from their past and hide in our communities.

Madam Chair, last week the Member for Edmonton-Glenora had some questions around whether or not there is need for this legislation. I'm happy to provide some clarity on why, in fact, yes, this does solve a problem. It is needed. I can say that because this came up just months ago, when dangerous offender Leo Teskey applied to a court to have a publication ban around the fact that he had an interest in seeking a legal change of name. I think this is critically important for us to recognize. You know, what does that really mean?

4:30

Let's look at what Leo Teskey was convicted of. Let's look at what he did to earn the definition or the designation of dangerous offender. This is a man who shot a police officer in the back of the head. This is a man who assaulted a toddler. For the purpose of this debate I'll leave it there, but let me tell you that as a father of a 19-month-old son, when I read what he actually did to that young boy, it nearly brought me to tears, and that is a matter of public record, Madam Chair. Leo Teskey, I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt, is an absolute monster. This is a man who beat his landlord within an inch of his life, and that gentleman then had to spend the

rest of his life, for 16 years, under daily care. There is no doubt in my mind that Leo Teskey and other convicted criminals like him who have achieved or earned the designation dangerous offender or long-term offender or high-risk offender should never be able to change their names, should never be able to hide from their past and hide in our communities.

That, Madam Chair, is why we're taking action to make sure that that will never be allowed to happen in Alberta. Alberta families should feel confident that they know who lives in their community and that convicted dangerous offenders can't hide next door or down the street or a few blocks away.

Madam Chair, I know the member also referenced legislation that already prohibited such offenders from being able to legally change their names, and I just want to clarify that that isn't the case. The Vital Statistics Act is the legislation that lays out the rules around legal changes of name, and it is currently silent on this. With the changes that we are bringing forward with this legislation, that will no longer be the case. Now, it could be that the member might have been referring to the ability of the registrar to decline a name change, and I do not deny that the registrar has that ability. However, it is so important that we are absolutely crystal clear in the legislation that this kind of a legal name change can never happen in these circumstances. By being clear about what the rules are, what the processes are, who is and who is not eligible to seek and complete a legal change of name, we make it very clear that everyone in Alberta knows right at the outset whether or not they would be eligible to legally change their name. This removes any question and any doubt.

Madam Chair, the member had a second question. She mentioned that she had been reached out to by members of the transgender community and had been asked whether or not this bill would impact them. I appreciate that question and am happy to provide some clarity. Let me be perfectly clear. No law-abiding Albertan will be affected by this change, period. The amendments in this bill before us tonight affect only those criminals who have a pattern of such violent and heinous criminal activity, that I described with the example of Mr. Teskey, and that are also likely to reoffend. Furthermore, just as a reminder, the Crown must also prove that a convicted offender is likely to reoffend in order to apply the dangerous offender or long-term offender designation to them. So no law-abiding Albertan of any kind, including members of the Alberta transgender community, will be impacted by this legislation in any way. I hope that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora finds that helpful and can reassure those folks who had reached out to her with that question. It's a good question, and I'm hoping that that puts any concerns to rest.

Madam Chair, Alberta's government must do whatever we can to keep Albertans safe, to keep them secure and protected in their communities, to give them peace of mind. Violent dangerous offenders should have to live with their names, just as survivors of violent crimes live with their trauma. Last year, to make Albertans feel safer, we prioritized a change that prevented convicted sex offenders from legally changing their names. This was extremely important, and it was met with great support from all across the province and for good reason. When we made those changes, we knew there was always a chance that we may need to expand the list of those violent offenders who should be prevented from completing a legal change of name in Alberta.

That is why I'm so pleased that we have been able to bring this legislation forward with this expansion of who this will apply to, so that we can ensure that dangerous offenders, long-term offenders, and high-risk offenders can never change their names legally in Alberta. I know that this will certainly make me feel safe as a father of a young child, and I want to make sure that this makes other

families all across the province feel a little bit more safe, a little bit more secure, and to give them peace of mind. It's the right thing to do, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I know I've said this before, and I'll say it again. Even if all the members in this Chamber support this legislation, as I hope they will, and even if we pass this quickly, as I hope we will, my job is not done. Our job is not complete because the protections that this legislation will give still stop at Alberta's borders. At the end of the day we're Alberta legislators, and that is our jurisdiction. So it would still be possible for these violent dangerous offenders, long-term offenders, to leave the province, take up residence in a province that has not yet enacted these strong protections, and change their name and eventually move back.

I recognize that's a problem, Madam Chair, and that is why I accept that my job will not be done just because we pass this legislation. That is why I have written to all of my counterparts across Canada to advocate to them, to share with them why this is such an urgent matter of public safety and of public concern and to offer to them my support in sharing all of the work that we have done to prepare this legislation and to, hopefully, get it across the finish line soon so that I can equip them with every tool they might need so that they can implement these same strong protections so that every Canadian can feel safe. Every Canadian deserves to feel safe, deserves to be protected from these violent criminals, these violent, convicted criminals. I will do everything I can to make sure that the rest of Canada can join us in implementing these strong protections so that every family in Canada can be safe.

I'm also grateful to the Premier, who has committed to raising this issue with every other Premier across the country, again, to reaffirm why this is so urgent, why this is necessary, and why we should all as legislators take action to protect the families that live all across Canada.

In summary, Madam Chair, let me just say: this is a good bill. It's good policy, and it's the right thing to do. I'm really proud to be bringing it forward. I look forward to the ongoing debate and look forward to having an opportunity to answer any other questions that may arise from all members in this House. With that, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill. I look forward to the rest of the discussion.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and to the minister for responding to many of the questions that I've already raised. I appreciate the desire – I think we want to enthusiastically support this bill, so my goal is to understand the scope of the problem so I can feel very excited about the solution. I'm going to ask one question about a totally different item, then we're going to get back to some of the other questions on the themes that the minister already mentioned.

I am aware that this bill changes the term "burial permit" to "burial and disposition permit," and I'm just wondering if the minister can give a little bit of additional background on what types of end-of-life practices this would encompass by making that change so that it's not just a burial permit but it's more inclusive.

I too want to state that the horrific incident that the minister spoke to – I don't think any Albertan would think about the harm that was done to so many in that situation and think it would be okay for the offender, convicted offender, to be able to hide in the shadows. The intent around wanting to make sure that if somebody has been found guilty of a horrific offence, they are unable to change their name in

an attempt to hide who they are, their identity, from the community: I think we concur on that.

My questions still lie slightly around the Bill 28 piece. We did just address this, I thought, recently, last July, through Bill 28, when we brought forward the Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020. I'm hoping for some clarity about: where was it silent? I think that we thought that we were addressing some of these challenges at that time, and it appears from the minister's comments that there wasn't that great of clarity. I guess that would be one of the questions.

4:40

Another example that people often bring up is around Vince Li, of course, who was part of the terrible Greyhound bus incident. He was the perpetrator. As I understand, because he was convicted of murder, he's not eligible to change his name. The other example given included murder as well, and I'm just uncertain as to why in that example somebody who murdered somebody would be allowed to change their name, and then in this example somebody wouldn't. I believe that heinous sex offences and murder were currently encompassed in the legislation, so I'd like the clarity around what the gaps were that we failed to identify when we considered this topic previously.

I appreciate the recognition that the registrar does have the ability to deny name changes currently. I guess I'm curious if we can have some information about how many times that happened over the last whatever time period the minister is comfortable sharing and how many times he's of the opinion that somebody breached what the intent of this bill is, somebody who was a dangerous offender who would now be encompassed by this bill. How many times has somebody been allowed to change their name who wouldn't be allowed to moving forward in this instance?

I think that there's some data that shows that about 4,000 Albertans a year change their name in some way, and I imagine that many of those have to do with family dynamics changing and those types of things. I'm wondering: of those 4,000 do we have any idea how many we believe would be prevented from changing their name based on the situation that's being proposed here today for consideration? There is a lot in a name, right? I know that members in this place have talked before about their identity and how deeply that's connected, often, to their names, whether it's the identity of them as a member of a family, their identity as their lineage and recognizing who some of their ancestors were, whether it's their identity for the contributions their family has made locally or in other cultural contexts or even abroad, so I think that it's important for us to just have slightly richer data.

I appreciate the narrative, and I completely agree that somebody who has acted in such a heinous way shouldn't be able to change their name for purposes of trying to escape the past, when obviously those who were survivors or didn't survive the victimization that they experienced can't move forward and hide what happened to them. They have to live or die with the consequences of what happened in that situation, so saying to somebody who has been convicted that they also have to live with the consequences of their name, I think, seems fair and reasonable. We're just trying to understand the scope of the problem that we're here solving today. Again, the narrative and the sort of qualitative piece: I think that the minister has very clearly demonstrated a clear commitment and passion to circumstances; I just want to have a bit of a quantitative measure of the impact on how many this could potentially prevent in the future.

Questions around: were there times where the registrar didn't prevent this from happening that the minister is aware of? And in general how many of the approximately 4,000 legal name changes

that happen in a typical year would be impacted by this change? Those are the primary questions that I wanted to ask. Oh, and then, of course, the burial permit versus burial and disposition permit. I know that some people have talked about other types of end-of-life ceremonies that they want to see move forward here in Alberta. I imagine that that might be part of what's happening in this legislation. I just want to have that clarity, whether it's traditional indigenous ceremonies, whether there are other ways of honouring one's remains at the time of passing, and how that might be influenced by this change in this bill here today.

I really appreciate the tone with which we have started this debate and look forward to it continuing as we gain a greater understanding and, hopefully, can end with enthusiastic support from all members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, through you, to the member. Let me just say that certainly the way in which I am taking the questions that have been raised is in that spirit that she described, which is wanting and leaning towards supporting this legislation, for which I'm grateful, but just seeking to get greater understanding before we take a final vote. I appreciate that. I think the questions that she has brought up are reasonable questions.

Let me start by saying that some of my colleagues have invested some time in preparing and doing some homework on this, and I know some of them are going to have a little bit more to say on that today. Some of what they discuss may answer some of those questions, so stay tuned. I'm not going to answer all of them right this second because I do think that my colleagues have some valuable comments to add to this debate. But I just wanted to take a moment to acknowledge that I think these are reasonable questions. I appreciate the spirit in which those questions are offered, and it is my hope that by the time we conclude discussion and debate on this, the member and her colleagues will feel that they have satisfactory answers. That's my hope.

In terms of some of the specific statistics that the member requested, I know that the approximation of the 4,000 number that she used to describe the volume of applications by Albertans for a legal change of name on an annual basis is in the ballpark of being, you know – it's right in that range. That's, I think, a good frame of reference for us to use to say: how many folks are looking to make use of this service?

I know we have some stats – I don't have them at my fingertips, but we can get them – that relate to the number of dangerous offenders and long-term offenders that reside in Alberta, which might be a good proxy to say: what is the risk? How many folks that we don't want changing their names might there be in the province, who, without this, would have that tool available to them? I think the fact that even one of them expressed an interest in wanting to seek to change his name and, not just that, was seeking a court order to do a publication ban on the fact that he was even thinking about it should, on its own, be a good enough reason for us to be taking the steps that we're proposing here. Again, we'll seek to get some of those numbers for the member before debate is over.

I hope that that's, you know, helpful just at least to frame the tone of this discussion and this debate and to acknowledge and respect the questions being offered. With that, I'm going to take my seat and let a few of my colleagues speak up, and I'm sure there may be others from the other side who may wish to add to the debate. I welcome that as well, and I look forward to where this discussion leads.

Thank you.

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to start off by thanking the minister for his presence in the Chamber today. I know that – oh, sorry; I'm not allowed to say that he is here or not here, and I apologize and withdraw for that wildly unparliamentary thing that I just did. I want to thank the minister for being attentive to Committee of the Whole proceedings generally. I think this minister has shown time and time again that he is willing to listen to both sides of the House and be here to answer questions and really engage with the opposition as well as government members, so I do want to start off by thanking the minister today for his commitment to Albertans and also to our democracy in this Legislature and for raising the bar on decorum and conversing very fluently with all sides of the House. I think that's really important, and sometimes we don't get enough of it in here. I think we can all agree that we can all do a little bit better. I do really appreciate his approach every day.

I'm not going to go over the Leo Teskey drama. I mean, we all know that Leo Teskey is a monster, for lack of a better word. He is this man who beat somebody within an inch of their life. He, you know, assaulted a two-year-old. This is the last person who should be out on our streets, let alone hiding in plain sight. He fits all the criteria of what we would say is a dangerous offender. For somebody like Mr. Teskey or somebody possessing that kind of malice for human life and disrespect for human life: there should be absolutely no reason why that kind of a person should be allowed to hide in plain sight and get away from the actions that he so dangerously caused on the lives of others. I'm thankful that our court system is what it is in Alberta and denied his request for parole so, I guess for now, Albertans don't need to worry about him going back on to the street.

4:50

Fundamentally, our job as legislators is to make things better, to find problems and solve them, to solve the problems that we see before us. I think that even if this helps to have one violent offender not be able to change their name, then we've done our work here. Every violent offender that we make known, every violent offender that we keep behind bars or ensure has to own up to the actions that they've taken is one less person who can go out and cause harm to others. I really do appreciate this bill.

I know that I also spoke to Bill 28, the Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020, in July. That bill, as other members have mentioned, did take steps to prevent that type of a scenario and protect Albertans by removing the ability of convicted sex offenders from changing their name. I know from speaking with constituents that they were happy to see this bill come through. It was something that I think garnered support from all sides of the political spectrum. No matter where you sat, it was an objectively good thing. I think that it's great that we can pass legislation such as that, that really brings people together, even on such a horrible thing.

Bill 28 was trail-blazing as we were the first jurisdiction in Canada to pass this type of legislation. I think that Bill 61 is just the next logical step in making Alberta a safer place. Our government must do all that it can to make Albertans feel safer in their communities, even if it's something that seems relatively small or something that seems like maybe it won't be used every day. This isn't a bill that applies every single day, but even if it applies just once, I do think it makes a difference.

Bill 61, the Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2021, takes another step towards protecting our province's residents. We did promise in our campaign that we would do these sorts of things, and it expands

on the good work of Bill 28. It keeps high-risk offenders from changing their names until their designation is removed. There is potential for opposition to this bill that would say that the bill doesn't account for rehabilitation or restorative justice. I would like to note that this legislation isn't meant to be punitive.

People can change, and we know that people can be rehabilitated. We're not doubting that, not negating that. That's why for those who are labelled as a high-risk offender, if they are rehabilitated and that high-risk offender designation is removed, then I guess they would be eligible for a legal change of name. But statistics show that dangerous and long-term offenders don't often rehabilitate, so I doubt that that will become an issue. While there are examples of violent offenders changing, the survivors of these horrible crimes must live with their trauma. So, too, should those people, who have inflicted that violent crime on another human, be forced to live with their name. There should be lifelong consequences for someone like Leo Teskey because his victims will suffer those lifelong effects.

Our justice system should be focused on protecting and supporting victims of violent crime, not allowing offenders to hide in plain sight in peaceful neighbourhoods. Survivors and victims' families never fully recover from the injuries that these predators inflict. It doesn't matter how many years of counselling you go to or how many times you see your therapist to limit the impact, those scars from somebody doing such a horrible thing to you or a family member or someone that you love will never fully heal.

This legislation will not affect the majority of the around 4,000 Albertans that the previous member talked about who legally change their name. This is very different than when someone gets married and chooses to take their spouse's name, as I will be doing in September now. Technically, that's called assuming a name, not legally changing your name. A legal name change actually changes the name on a birth certificate.

Assigning someone the designation of being a dangerous or long-term offender is not done lightly. A dangerous offender designation is used for those who exhibit what's called "a pattern of repetitive behaviour" and "a pattern of persistent aggressive behaviour" which is unlikely to change. That definition is provided by the Criminal Code of Canada.

Offenders are deemed to be long-term when they are convicted for a pattern of sexual offences and the Crown has approved those perpetrators that are likely to reoffend. In both of these cases the Crown must apply and prove the need for these criminals to receive this designation. To me it's not something that seems like it is given lightly, although I'm not a lawyer. I can imagine that it would not be something that would be given to someone lightly. You would have to, unfortunately, earn that badge.

High-risk offenders are those that to law enforcement seem to pose a significant risk to the public before they are released. This designation, while important to public safety, recognizes that many deserve the chance at the rehabilitation that they need for restorative justice. The designation is in itself meant to be temporary, but it is only removed when the offender shows significant change through their actions, and, like I said before, statistically they are unlikely to improve.

Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes and neighbourhoods. We know this, Madam Chair. We do things all the time to make sure that people feel safer in their neighbourhoods, whether that's, you know, talking about discrimination or antiracism initiatives or whether that's talking about rural crime and investing in ALERT and things like that. This is just one more way that we can make sure that Albertans feel secure, knowing that they're protected and that criminals cannot be hiding in plain sight.

I want to once again thank the Minister of Service Alberta for his dedication to the Chamber and for answering questions and for being so attentive to the debates going on around the legislation that he presents. I want to thank all members in the House for the tone of the debate as well as for raising the bar on decorum on such an important issue. I think we know that this is something that can achieve unanimous support from our Chamber, and I hope that it does. I will be supporting Bill 61, and I hope that the rest of the Chamber does as well.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 61 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Appreciate the opportunity to get up and address, briefly, Bill 61 that's before us and also to keep in mind with the tone here, which is to be constructive and to find out more and to understand more. I appreciate the minister speaking to the reason for the bill coming forward, which amends Bill 28.

I certainly understand that Mr. Teskey was applying to courts and that he was looking for a ban on the sharing of that information for what he was applying for, a name change, but I didn't hear the outcome of the proceedings. That was something where if the minister did say it, I didn't hear it, and I wonder what the outcome of the proceedings were. Was Mr. Teskey denied? Did the system work? If it did: good. If it didn't, I'd like to know that, too, and perhaps that's part of the reason why we're here.

The other things that I was just looking through the bill and reading – of course, it's not a very long one, but it does do a few things. I certainly have no issues with amending section 2, which talks about what my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora talked to, a burial and disposition permit – I have an interest in wondering how they are different, too, but I don't have any issue with it – and subsection (b) with respect to changing the place and being more inclusive than the previous legislation had been. Certainly seems like a good thing.

The third part is really just changing from "a parent" to "a person." These days that's more respectful, and I think "parent" brings with it the fact that there is a biological tie between the child and the parent whereas "a person," I think, recognizes that there may not be an actual biological connection.

Then from seven to 10 days, too: I don't have any issue with that.

The questions that I bring: I'm wondering if previously the registrar missed things and allowed people who were convicted of a designated offence to actually change their name. I didn't hear that in the explanations from the minister. He certainly talked about the number of people who change their names, in the 4,000s annually, and I did hear the minister say that this would be much more clear, make it very clear, and it would lay it out in these statutes. Obviously, it's here. But I didn't get the sense that the registrar was perhaps – you know, it's not the right way to say it – messing up in this regard.

5:00

I did get that the minister felt that making it very clear would make it more clear to all Albertans. I don't know if the registrar was part of that entity, part of the people needing things to be made more clear. That would be helpful to understand.

I think what the minister has done, to be an advocate for this change across the country, is commendable in terms of trying to create harmony, unanimity in how Canada, its provinces and territories, deals with this situation. That's in the interest of all

Canadians. I think that that harmonious approach can only make things better for us going forward.

I must confess that if the minister were here, it would be helpful to hear his words on this. I know what the previous legislation, that's being amended, says in terms of: "has not been convicted of a designated offence." And then on the page opposite, on the left-hand side, are the amendments, of course. Part (a) is the same. I just wonder if (b) and (c) are inclusive in a designated offence, or are they something different than what a person who is convicted of a designated offence means? That would be something I would appreciate clarification on just so I know the full breadth of what the people who are offenders are being defined as when and if this ever becomes something that I need to refer back to.

The number of people who would be concerned about this, of course, is – I guess another way of saying it is that it's unfortunate that there are so many people who have been negatively affected by the actions of people who have been convicted of designated offences. The more we can do to address the needs of the victims – and that may not be a totally accurate term. Many people who have been impacted by the horrendous actions of others don't see themselves as victims. They want to take back their power, I guess, and not be called a victim, and that's certainly understandable. I think the more we can do to support people who are impacted by actions that are heinous and the things that are outlined here is good, is appropriate and right.

I don't have too many more questions. Bill 28 is being changed with regard to this amended bill before us. Maybe just a comment from the minister about how effective Bill 28 was. If it was working, that's great. We did something well. But I know that this amendment is, I think, in his words, making things very, very clear. Was it unclear for registrars in the past, or was it unclear for courts? Who was it unclear for that we're taking this time? I certainly don't mind doing the work, being here, talking about this, thinking about this with all of my colleagues in the Leg. today, but I just want to kind of understand: who was unclear with the previous Bill 28? Was it the registrar, as I suspect, perhaps? Was it the courts that needed greater clarity? Or was it Albertans who generally were pushing for greater clarity?

Those are some of my comments, and I'll leave them. Hopefully, the minister will be back to address them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, Paul Jason Teale may never be released from prison in Canada because of his horrific crimes. Many of us may not know Paul Teale, but we would know Paul Bernardo, who is the real Paul Teale. He is one of Canada's most notorious serial rapists, serial killers, and torturers. An average Albertan would not be concerned if a notification came out or they found out that a new neighbour moved into their neighbourhood and that that new neighbour was Paul Teale. No one knows who he is. But if they knew that Paul Bernardo, a man who had previously drugged, raped, tortured, and dismembered women and encased their body parts in cement, was planning to move into their community, it would be a different story. That is the danger that can exist when we allow serious criminal offenders of violent crimes the ability to change their names in our province and country.

Our job as legislators is to make Alberta the safest place possible. That's why in July 2020 our government passed Bill 28, which was the Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2020, the first version. This Bill 28 prohibited those who were convicted of sexual offences and

sexual crimes from legally changing their names in this province to hide from their heinous and, frankly, disgusting past. Bill 61 takes those changes a step further to prohibit offenders of dangerous crimes from also changing their name in our province.

I believe that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had asked a question as to whether Bill 28 had been effective since its implementation. I do know that since Bill 28 was passed and received royal assent by the Crown, there has not been a single applicant who has put their name forward to change their name for a sex offence in Alberta, so I believe that we can confidently say that this legislation has hindered or at least deterred people from even attempting to do so because they know that they won't be able to. To answer your question, there have been zero applications to date since Bill 28 initially passed.

Bill 61, which is the furthering of Bill 28, will now prohibit, if passed, dangerous offenders, long-term offenders, and high-risk offenders from changing their names. Just to provide some clarity as to what sorts of people these are, those who are defined as dangerous offenders are those who have committed crimes of personal injury, sexual assault, aggravated assault, manslaughter, arson, or kidnapping. These dangerous offenders are those who are given a title by the Crown as the most dangerous in our society and those who are likely to commit future harm or injury as determined by the Crown. This legislation would also impact long-term offenders, who are repeat offenders who are also deemed dangerous and likely to reoffend, as well as high-risk offenders, who are typically those who have recently gotten out on parole and are oftentimes younger than your average long-term or dangerous offender and who are at risk of reoffence.

These definitions are defined by the Criminal Code of Canada. Those deemed as a dangerous offender – again, the most severe type of criminal in our land – are those who as per the Criminal Code of Canada are deemed to represent "a pattern of repetitive behaviour" or "a pattern of persistent aggressive behaviour."

Madam Chair, here on this side of the House and, it sounds like – I'm optimistic – the opposite side of the House we believe that violent dangerous offenders should have to live with their names and identity, just the same as the survivors and the victims of their violent crimes have to live with their trauma. For those who've committed these dangerous crimes and for those who have the serious, most repetitive history of committing these crimes in our country, there need to be lifelong consequences because the victims are suffering lifelong effects. Some of them may not even have their lives anymore, and it's the family members left behind that have to suffer those long-term effects, and those effects pervade everyone in their communities and in their networks.

5:10

I firmly believe that our justice system should be focused on, first, protecting and supporting victims of violent crime, not allowing offenders, especially those at risk of reoffence, to hide in our communities behind new names and erase their former identity and, with it, their former past. Albertans deserve to feel safe, secure, and protected in their neighbourhoods in Alberta.

I'll never forget, back in the campaign, when I was door-knocking one day. I think that likely everyone in this Assembly and most people somewhere within their network, whether that be your friends, your family – we as legislators have probably larger networks than the average person – have encountered an individual who has been the victim of a serious crime. I will never forget one day when I was door-knocking in Springbank, a fairly rural community, where rural crime is pervasive. I parked my car on the side of the road to go door-knocking, and within the hour I got three phone calls from the RCMP that my car had been reported three separate times by

various people as being suspicious just because it was parked there and they didn't recognize it and the neighbourhood was on such high alert.

I showed up to one house and knocked on the door. I wouldn't typically consider myself a very intimidating person, as much as I may try to be. I showed up at this house, and I was met by a fellow with a baseball bat. He'd answered the door with a baseball bat because he was so terrified that I was someone ringing his doorbell. Just a couple of weeks prior there had been an incident right in their neighbourhood, on their street, where a vehicle had showed up, the people inhabiting and driving that vehicle had been high on crystal meth, and they had smashed out the windows of a homeowner's home while they were home. They had bear-maced the homeowners while they were in their own home, stolen a lot of their property, and then driven away with their vehicle.

The entire community was on such high alert that when the five-foot-two, blond Member for Banff-Kananaskis showed up, they met me at the door with a baseball bat because they were so scared of anyone coming to their door. They were just suffering the consequences from that previous encounter from weeks ago. While the individuals who broke into their home and bear-maced them may not quite be deemed so dangerous as to receive an official title by the Crown as a dangerous or a long-term offender, that incident for them was still just as traumatizing, and it really shows how serious these violent crimes can be on families and communities in Alberta.

That incident also, for me, reinforces the need for significant reform and for significant protections and changes to our justice system in Alberta as a whole. That's why I've been so proud to be part of this government, who has taken great strides to strengthen our justice system in Alberta and protect victims of crime. We've done a lot of work on this file. Some of the other initiatives we've taken have been to found the Alberta Parole Board. Those of us who represent rural communities know that the revolving door on rural crime is extremely frustrating and terrifying and devastating to our rural communities and those who've been victims of repeat break-ins and property crimes. We appointed a chief firearms officer to protect law-abiding firearms owners in Alberta. We passed a Trespass Statutes Amendment Act to protect rural property owners and farmers from trespassing.

We've launched a feasibility study on an Alberta police force to see if there is any viability or potential to create a police force that is as responsive to rural Albertans as could possibly be. We followed Saskatchewan's lead and introduced Clare's law. We passed the first set of legislation in Alberta's history to combat human trafficking and set out a definition of human trafficking and tort laws to protect women and girls and victims of human trafficking in their homes, wherever they may be. We also expanded the victims of crime fund so that there would be additional dollars to protect and provide direct supports to victims of crime in Alberta. We did that, actually, by increasing fines on the offenders of crimes from 5 per cent to 20 per cent.

Bill 28 was the next complement in that package, where we prohibited and banned those who had been convicted of sexual offences from changing their names in Alberta to hide behind a new identity and possibly reoffend or pretend to be someone they're not in new relationships and new places in our province. Bill 61 is the next step in that right direction. Bill 61 is the cherry on top of that package to protect Albertans from crime and to strengthen our justice system to make sure that the most serious offenders in our society are also unable to hide from their heinous pasts and create a new identity for themselves.

If I look here, I believe that, just to throw some numbers out, currently living in Alberta – and some of these numbers are slightly

outdated; but for dangerous offenders, this is current as of 2018, so a couple of years ago – we had 55 active dangerous offenders living in Alberta; yeah, still active, not those who had committed crimes in Alberta but 55 active dangerous offenders living in our province. Those are, again, the most serious convicted offenders in our society, those similar to Paul Bernardo. We had, as of 2018 as well, 77 long-term offenders as deemed by the Crown in Alberta in the Criminal Code. High-risk offenders: as of 2021, so just this year, we currently still have 94 high-risk offenders living in Alberta. Well over 200 individuals are living in our province who, without this legislation, would have free rein to change their name and create a new identity for themselves, move to our communities, and possibly reoffend without anyone knowing who they are, where they came from, or what their past is.

As I stated earlier, I believe – and I believe that it sounds like most members of this House will agree – that those who've offended and been convicted of serious crimes need to live with their identity and their actions just as much as the victims of the crimes they've committed need to live with their trauma, and Bill 61 enforces that. I will be happily – I shouldn't say "happily." I will be proudly supporting this legislation to strengthen our justice system here in Alberta and support past victims of crime and, hopefully, protect and limit the number of future victims of crime we have in this province, and I hope that our opposition will as well. It sounds like we may be getting unanimous support from this House.

For anyone else listening, I do hope – I know that our Minister of Service Alberta has issued a call to action for all other provinces in this country to consider following suit in introducing similar if not identical legislation. If there's anyone else out there across the country watching right now – it may be unlikely – I do encourage other provinces and other leaders to consider adopting similar legislation. I think this is a win for our societies, and it's a really great way to support our victims and make sure that we limit the number of people falling victim and falling prey to crime in the future.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 61? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Not in response. But just under subsection (3)(d) it says: "the Registrar determines that a public body has disclosed personal information relating to the person under [this] section." The only bodies that I'm aware of that disclose this information are police services. Are there others that do this regularly that I've missed, or is it just police services? If it is, I wonder why it was identified as a public body, but perhaps there are Crowns that do it and other legal bodies that do it. That was just a little bit of a clarification. Like, what does that mean in this context? Police services only, or are there other bodies that do this disclosing? I didn't know.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 61 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to make one brief comment because it has been something that has been brought up by constituents with respect to this piece of legislation proposing amendments to the Vital Statistics Act. That has to do with transgendered people. They expressed concerns to me about having to go through a process which basically makes them feel like criminals when they do wish to undergo a name change as a transgendered person. I know the minister has mentioned in his comments that no transgendered people will be impacted. I'm not sure what he meant by that word, but I really want the minister, at

first opportunity, to really clarify exactly what communications he's had from transgendered people regarding name change processes and what he means when he says that they won't be impacted by this process.

I know that there are some real fears by those in the transgender community, who, of course, in many cases wish to change their names to reflect their proper gender identity, that they have to go through a fingerprinting process, as if they were criminals, in this change-of-name process, so I'd like some clarification around that. The whole transgender community is really looking for clarity on this, and I think it's reasonable that they not be treated or feel like they've been treated like a class of criminals going through the name change process.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 61? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

5:20

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Madam Chair. Absolutely my pleasure to be able to rise and speak in support of Bill 61, the Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2021, today. I rise in this House not just to support this vitally important bill, but I also do it to affirm my support for victims of violence and sexual assault in this province.

I would like to thank the Minister of Service Alberta for his integral work on this bill and his work on the bill passed last year, Bill 28, the Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020. I was very proud of our government for drafting and implementing that legislation last year. I do remember that during third reading or during question period I reached out to the minister and asked if they would continue to expand the closing of these loopholes that allow convicted offenders to be able to change their name and hide from their past, so I'm very pleased to see Bill 61 come forward this spring.

Closing this loophole that allows those convicted of sexual assault to change their name will help and save others from becoming victims in this province. I've had the privilege to speak to many nonprofits and service organizations in my constituency that help vulnerable Albertans. One that I speak to frequently – and they do great work – is Rowan House in High River. I've heard the stories of many vulnerable Albertans, the heart-wrenching stories that they have. Protecting Albertans is important to me, and I'm sure it's important to every member of this House. Bill 61 will help do that.

Bill 61, the Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2021, continues the important work done on this file last year to help make all of our communities safer. This legislation would amend the Vital Statistics Act to prohibit dangerous, long-term, or high-risk offenders from completing a legal change of name. If passed, Alberta will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to prohibit dangerous, long-term, or high-risk offenders from completing legal name changes, and I hope that we're not the last.

Before I go any further, I want to define what these designations are, just for deeper understanding. The dangerous offender designation is used for those who, according to the Criminal Code of Canada, exhibit a pattern of repetitive behaviour and a pattern of persistent aggressive behaviour that is unlikely to change. Long-term offender status is for those convicted of a pattern of sexual offences and those whom the Crown has proven are likely to reoffend. The Crown must apply for and prove the need for a convicted criminal to be designated as a dangerous or long-term offender. Lastly, a high-risk offender is an individual recently paroled or released from prison who law enforcement considers a risk to the public and is likely to reoffend.

Prohibiting these individual offenders from changing their names will make our communities safer and help to continue our 2019 campaign commitment to help vulnerable Albertans through legislation like this.

Currently around 4,000 Albertans change their name legally every year, and the vast majority of these changes are done by individuals with no dangerous background. But there have been instances of dangerous criminals changing their names and then moving into a new area, leaving their new neighbours in the dark about their past. The changes made in this bill will not cause any additional red tape or delays for those who legally want to change their name. These changes only affect offenders within one of these three designations.

Now, some may believe that these changes are punitive actions against an individual designated as either a high-risk, a dangerous, or a long-term offender, but the changes in this bill are not meant to be punitive and should not be seen as such. The changes made in this bill are meant to ensure that Albertans, in particular vulnerable Albertans, feel safe and feel secure in their own communities. Violent and dangerous criminals should have to live with their names for the rest of their lives. Offenders with one of these three designations should not be lumped together with individuals who made a bad decision, made a mistake, and ended up in violence. Offenders with these designations are those who have a pattern of violence or are viewed by law enforcement as having the potential to act violently again. I think these changes should be welcomed by everyone in this House, and I'm proud once again to see that our province is in the forefront of this important issue.

Along with the changes I just mentioned, Bill 61 also makes several administrative changes. These administrative changes expand the definition of place so that Albertans can have their life events, like their birth, their death, or their marriage, registered in a place where the event actually occurred. As it happens, right now the Vital Statistics Act only recognizes cities, towns, hamlets, and villages. Government officials, those who work for the government of Alberta, I think, on a daily basis, receive calls asking for these designations to be expanded. In fact, I did hear the story of one family that felt it very important that their grandfather's place of death be listed as the Maskwacis reserve because of his connection to the land. The scope of places, I think, has expanded in our province, and I think that this is a respectful thing to do, to recognize our First Nation reserves and our Métis settlements. Even the designation for marking events that take place in our provincial and our national parks in this province becomes important.

Bill 61 will also change the definition of a burial permit to a burial and disposition permit, which will help provide an additional clarification and accuracy. It really makes it much simpler if somebody chooses cremation as their means of disposition in this province.

Bill 61 also extends the amount of time in which registration information must be provided to the registrar if a newborn child is found deserted, from seven days up to 10 days. Another change that will assist families is that the criteria for who can apply to change the particulars of the parentage or change the name shown on a birth record of a child will be expanded.

Madam Chair, Albertans want to live in safe communities and to know if dangerous offenders live near them. This is at the heart of Bill 61. This is important to victims of sexual assault and victims of violence. It is also important to other vulnerable Albertans and families across the province. Prohibiting dangerous, high-risk, and long-term offenders from changing their legal names will help make our communities safer for everyone.

Because of this, I urge and encourage all the members of this House today to vote in favour of Bill 61. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 61 in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, I will ask the question.

[The clauses of Bill 61 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 61 and report progress on Bill 57.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 61. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 57. 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 Speaker: Hon. members, all in favour of the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 62

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate April 20: Mr. Deol]

Mr. Schow: It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that you need someone to adjourn debate on this Bill 62. I am happy to move that.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 65

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate April 14: Mrs. Allard]

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

5:30

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think there are a few wires crossed.

I rise today to speak to Bill 65, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, and I will cut straight to the chase by introducing an amendment that I'm proposing.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If you just want to pass those through, we'll proceed in moment.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as REF1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 65, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 65, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

If I can provide a little bit of context – I don't want to speak for too long because I am hopeful that the government will take this under due consideration and put this capable Committee on Families and Communities to good work – what we are here being asked to consider in Bill 65 is a very omnibus piece of legislation in terms of that it addresses a number of different pieces through one bill. Any time an omnibus is brought forward, it definitely, I think, warrants an opportunity for members to be able to engage and consider feedback from groups that are directly impacted and to understand some of the motivations around tying so many pieces of legislation together in one bill.

As we navigate this pandemic, I think it's clear that the Legislature would benefit from additional consultations with stakeholders. I think that there have been more lawn signs popping up in neighbourhoods throughout the province than we've seen outside of election periods, in my recollection, whether it's lawn signs as they relate to parks or coal or pensions or education curriculum or health care. Let's not forget that. There is clearly a desire for Albertans to feel more engaged and connected to the work that their government is doing.

I want to say that one of the areas the omnibus bill touches on is in response to a very tragic death for Sharon Grace Lewis, who died what all reports are would be a terrible death. Sharon was experiencing houselessness. She used substances, and she very likely had a deep history with mental illness. She died, from the reports that I'm reading right now, primarily a story from the CBC, tied to a wheelchair in an ambulance bay of a hospital, and, rightfully so, that horrific death warranted a fatality inquiry. Imagine being in need of medical help, being just metres away from people who can help you and die feeling alone and literally tethered so that there is no way to actually seek help.

There was a fatality inquiry, and Judge Dixon made additional recommendations, a number of them, to ensure that we don't incur the same fate again here in the province of Alberta. I believe this bill addresses one of the recommendations, so I guess that's positive that there is one, but there are other pieces that, I think, are certainly lacking in terms of the comprehensiveness of this bill's ability to address the actual recommendations. Judge Dixon's inquiry made additional recommendations related to the death that I believe need to be considered, and I think that this committee would be the appropriate place to consider those.

Ms Lewis, as I mentioned – this horrific death did warrant an investigation and did warrant a review. That review resulted in recommendations, and I think it would be wise of us to make sure that all of the recommendations were incorporated. If we are going to bring in an omnibus bill that impacts so many different pieces of legislation, let's make sure that it impacts the right ones and that it's going to result in the right changes as we move forward. Unfortunately, we don't see most of those recommendations in this bill. We do see one. It also begs the question for members of the Assembly: why not? I think that that would be important information as we consider this bill. If that information can be provided in this Chamber, great. I would love to have that clarity. I think it's something that warrants discussion among the committee.

Why is this government only taking one of the recommendations put forward by Judge Dixon when it is such a substantial piece of

legislation? For this reason, many others would have an opportunity to engage in this in the committee, and we could make sure that we acted in a more thoughtful way to address the recommendations because we never want to repeat the horrific outcome of what happened to Sharon Lewis.

Then an unrelated example: let's consider the changes that are being made to the automobile insurers act. It is so strange for me to talk about two such different topics in one bill, but this is what this bill is sort of doing, jamming a bunch of different pieces together. In terms of the automobile insurers submitting an annual report, this legislation now gives the Minister of Finance the power to waive penalties for insurers at the minister's discretion. It appears to be a significant change in approach to what used to be clear rules that had to be followed. Now there's going to be a large piece of ambiguity there, yet the government hasn't given us a clear reason as to why the minister needs this power or why it might be used to waive penalties for insurers.

I think this is something – I imagine every one of us in this room is a member of some insurance plan, and every Albertan would be impacted by insurers having it at the minister's discretion, the impacts of their fees. If this is a solution in search of a problem, let's hear what the actual problem was because it's difficult for me to discern that from this bill. What are the other motives that could be at play here? I think these are fair questions. We just don't know, and if the government can't provide a compelling reason, then I think it warrants us having an opportunity to investigate this with stakeholders as it relates to the insurance sector as well because so far it doesn't appear that there has been consultation with stakeholders. If there has, it definitely wasn't reported in a transparent way, so that would be helpful to, I think, all members before we make a decision on that.

During normal times it is important to consult, and during the pandemic, when folks have their intention elsewhere often, of course, worrying about their own safety and well-being, their security, their incomes, their family's safety, I think it's upon us to be even more transparent to make sure that we're being proactive in engaging the public about changes that will impact them, and I believe that this change could impact every Albertan. We think that this warrants more engaged consultation, and I think that the members of the committee to which I refer are very capable. I think we can use our standing committees in richer ways, and I think that this bill could be one of those.

With that, I move that we adjourn debate on this consideration of Bill 65.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 62

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

5:40

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 62, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021. First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, it must be said that the premise of the act is a good one. It should be clear to the members of this Legislature that for our province's economy to kick back into full gear, our businesses must not be subjected to arcane rules and superfluous bureaucracy. This bill is a step in the right direction. Elimination of unnecessary red tape and reductions in bureaucracy are key to keeping Alberta in line with similar jurisdictions, ensuring efficiency and simplicity within our regulatory framework, and encouraging new investment that will help secure a strong economy

for our province over the long run. We need to encourage businesses to come here, not discourage them so they want to leave.

There are a few sections of the bill that I'd like to highlight in particular, Mr. Speaker. Let's start with the amendments to the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, AUC. These amendments would allow the government to implement timelines for the commission to issue decisions and orders. This is a common-sense change that I'm glad to see, that the AUC will now be subject to timelines. The AUC, as we all know, is an important regulator. The decisions made by the commission affect Albertans' absolute necessities – water, electricity, natural gas, et cetera – and it's not hard to come to the conclusion that the work done by the commission impacts every Albertan every day.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, it seems obvious to me that there ought to be some timelines on this regulatory commission, and they should be expected to meet those timelines. When you're running a business, crunching the family budget, and making plans for the future, certainty is key. It's my belief that certainty is owed to the people of Alberta and that this change will give them more certainty over the utilities that they rely on day in and day out.

Further, it is my hope that with the introduction of these timelines, the regulatory process for utilities will not only become more predictable but more efficient. To this point, Mr. Speaker, none of us are strangers to the many debates that focus on energy and resources in this House. These debates are often heated over what kind of energy to pursue, how the government should be involved, and so on. The reality, though, is that no matter what forms of energy our province embraces in the years ahead, regulatory burden and the speed or lack thereof of bureaucracy will prove to slow potential economic growth and keep Alberta stagnant. That is why I believe that efficiency and certainty are so important and why I am an emphatic supporter of section 1 of the red tape reduction act.

Changing gears, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to focus now on section 4 of the bill, which introduces a simple yet impactful change to the Employment Standards Code. No one in this Legislature disputes the importance of keeping accurate, up-to-date records, especially for records as significant as hours worked. This amendment, therefore, continues to require the exact same data recording requirements, hours worked per day, but makes the recording of this data a much less onerous task for businesses, especially small businesses, by giving them the flexibility of recording it at an interval that ensures the records are kept up to date rather than a hardline daily recording requirement that exists currently.

This is a sensible change, Mr. Speaker, a change that will not impact the quality of records kept but that will ease the burden on businesses small and large. If you're a small employer employing two employees, it would not be unreasonable to record the hours worked per day at the end of the week, for instance. If you're a large employer with several dozen employees recording their hours worked per day, it could make sense to update the records daily. This change allows for that. It gives businesses the power to choose when they record that data so long as the records are kept up to date.

Fundamentally, this change moves the hours worked recording requirement from a prescriptive, inflexible regulation to a strong but flexible regulation that makes clear that businesses are expected to keep up-to-date records, as they currently do, but are trusted to make the decision for themselves about how often they update them. I think it's clear, Mr. Speaker, that I am very much in favour of this section of the bill.

I'm going to pivot to a few quick words on the changes to the Fatal Accidents Act. It deals with the five-year review of bereavement damages and where the results of that review are announced. Currently the Fatal Accidents Act requires that upon the completion

of the five-year review, a member of Executive Council informs the Assembly on the result of the review. The amendment proposed would change this to require the minister to report the result of the review on the government's website and any other means that the minister deems necessary.

This change has two effects, Mr. Speaker. The first and most consequential is that by shifting the medium of this announcement to the web as well as other means, this announcement can be much better publicized. It's certain that there are many Albertans who are deeply affected by changes in bereavement damages and that in all likelihood they are not watching the Legislature every day even though I'm sure every Albertan would love to watch the Alberta Legislature channel every day. With this shift to the Internet it is my belief that the results of these important reviews will become more accessible to the average citizen and that increased transparency is good for our province.

The second change, Mr. Speaker, is that by shifting this announcement to mediums outside the Legislature, this House will be able to get just a bit more done, a very modest time savings, I admit, but these efficiencies start to add up when they are numerous. I'm very happy, therefore, to offer my support to section 6 of this bill.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the last section of the bill I wish to touch on is section 9, which updates the mandate of Travel Alberta. I don't need to explain the impact of the pandemic, what it has had on travel and tourism-related businesses. Every single member in this Legislature has seen the devastation of this industry impact their ridings. With this in mind, it seems like common sense to introduce economic development considerations to the mandate of Travel Alberta.

In my recent member's statement, Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the Rumble Alberta touring challenge. I had mentioned that it was built as a way for Albertans to support Albertan businesses and discover

hidden gems across the province. I have no doubt that the event will prove to be a smashing success and, frankly, a needed success. We ought to encourage more events like Rumble Alberta, that will drive the economic recovery from COVID-19 in the coming months in a safe manner. Through this addition to the mandate of Travel Alberta the government is saying loud and clear that we value events like Rumble Alberta, that we need events like Rumble Alberta, and that we will work to make events like Rumble Alberta into the great successes that they can be. I support this section of the bill, and I really hope that once Travel Alberta's mandate is expanded, we start to see more of those events that will eventually bring us closer to normal and boost our economy along the way.

As I draw to a close, it is clear that the government has gone to great lengths to bring this bill forward as it is today. It's a big step in the right direction, and I commend the government and especially the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction for his and their dedication to cutting bureaucracy and building a fair, more efficient, and modern regulatory system. While I wasn't able to speak to every part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, I hope that my commentary has provided some insight, that my fellow hon. colleagues will concur with my assessment that the red tape reduction act of 2021 is a great piece of legislation and ought to be brought into law.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank all members of the Assembly for a job well done today. At this point in time I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m.]

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