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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 31, 2021

Day 106

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 31, 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.

Statement by the Speaker

Kamloops Residential School Gravesite Discovery

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to proceeding to the national anthem, I wish to make some remarks on the recent discovery that was made at the site of a residential school near Kamloops, British Columbia. It is with great and utter sadness that no words can describe the loss that those close must feel and the loss that our country is coming to grips with. Let us honour the memory of these children in a silent moment of prayer.

Hon. members, please remain standing for the playing of our national anthem.

Recording:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Kamloops Residential School Gravesite Discovery

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just bear with me a little.

This weekend, Mr. Speaker, Canadians learned a devastating truth indigenous families and loved ones have known since their children did not come home from school during a dark period in this country's history. With the news of a mass grave of 215 children found at the site of the Kamloops residential school last week, this revelation has spread shock waves across the world and has reopened old wounds and heartfelt pain at home all the farther. Many generations of parents had their children taken from them and sent to schools, stripped of their cultures and their languages.

Growing up as a child outside of Pigeon Lake, I saw friends of mine no longer show up at school. Nobody knew where they went. They were taken somewhere else. These were the acts that strike directly at the heart of people and have caused harm to this day. I'm not talking about ancient history. The last of these schools only closed in 1996.

Mr. Speaker, indigenous Canadians lost more than their culture. Their young lives were taken away, leaving their families and communities with unending loss. Last night at the rally I attended only a few feet from here, out front, it was mentioned that many of these children may have grown up to be the elders, the healers, and the community leaders that we need desperately today. Many are hearing the news of this loss with sorrow and disbelief. Others have lived with this pain for generations.

As a government, as citizens, as neighbours, and as friends we have a road marked through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to find our way towards healing. It includes 94 calls to action that draw from the legacy of the indigenous residential school system. I urge everyone in this House and in their homes to read these calls to action and, most importantly, to take action and become an ally. Our government, Mr. Speaker, knows we have a moral obligation to do better, and work is happening. It is work that continues between our government, our First Nations through protocol agreements. It happens with the vaccines shared in and with communities and by encouraging the next generation of indigenous professionals healing, teaching, and building for a strong future, and that will not be erased.

These children and all those who never made it home will not be forgotten. As we grieve together, the flags at both the Legislature, the Federal Building, and the McDougall Centre in Calgary have all been lowered to half-mast to honour these children that have been lost.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the minister for his very profound words.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I deliver this statement to the House today. It was only days ago that we learned about the remains of 215 children buried at the site of the former Kamloops residential school, 215 bodies hidden for years, their cases undocumented. Some were as young as three years old. I can only imagine the great things these children would have accomplished had they lived, and I along with so many others am heartbroken at the thought of all this lost humanity.

There is no way to describe or comprehend the grief that this will cause the families and communities of those who lost loved ones. Indeed, we have seen and heard the impact from across the country. This case reminds us all of the horrific, ugly legacy of residential schools and the impact that they still leave on Canada to this day. The Kamloops school was open for 79 years. It closed only in 1969. This is not a point of politics but a reminder that we owe indigenous communities so much more.

My call today is simple. This government must work with indigenous communities and make sure that they have the resources and supports they need. They must work to ensure that every single recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is enacted. There are six recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that specifically address missing children and burial information: 71, ensure all records of death of aboriginal children be made available to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation; 72, "allocate sufficient resources . . . to develop and maintain the National Residential School Student Death Register"; 73, "maintain an online registry of residential school cemeteries"; 74, "inform the families of children who died . . . of the child's burial location"; 75, develop procedures "for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries";

76, ensure aboriginal communities lead these strategies, and respect aboriginal protocols before any potentially invasive work.

In light of the devastating news we learned this week from Kamloops, this government must make it a priority to ensure that these recommendations are delivered and available to every community that wishes to use them. Let us put aside our politics and centre the experiences of First Nations people above all else. We owe it to the communities. We owe it to the children.

Thank you.

1:40

Members' Statements

Mark Carney

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, in my experience, if it's one thing that folks in Alberta can't stand, it's hypocrisy, and they get especially riled up when it's a political figure or politician who is the hypocrite. We saw an example of hypocrisy of the highest order last week in Ottawa. Who was the star of the show? Well, of course, it was Justin Trudeau's hand-picked future star Mark Carney. Most Albertans are aware of Mr. Carney's long record of hostility towards Canada's oil sector and industry. Like many members of Trudeau's inner circle, he makes no effort to hide it.

What many people don't know is that Mr. Carney's own company actually has significant investments in oil and gas infrastructure in the Middle East and in South America. When asked in the House of Commons industry committee to explain this apparent contradiction, the answer was shocking. It wasn't a justification based on commercial consideration. It wasn't based on providing the best return on investment. It was based on a clear double standard. Apparently, Mr. Carney believes that supporting responsibly and ethically produced Alberta oil is not acceptable while also believing that there is no issue with the massive pipeline projects in Brazil or the UAE.

Imagine being an aspiring politician in Canada and running on a platform of explicitly destroying Canadian jobs while simultaneously supporting those being created overseas. Only an elitist Liberal could be so ignorant as to think it is an acceptable policy to advocate. I mean, even the folks across the hall here deny their record of opposition to oil and gas. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Mr. Pierre Poilievre for exposing this glaring hypocrisy and for standing up for Alberta energy workers. And, Mr. Carney, Justin Trudeau, and the Liberal Party: you can be sure that the government of Alberta and the people of Alberta will continue to fight against these policies that aim to destroy Canadian jobs and prosperity. A federal government should be working to pull us together, not to tear us apart.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

Mr. Dang: I'll begin by stating the obvious, Mr. Speaker: I hope that this reopening plan announced by the Premier is successful; I hope that we are finally seeing the end of this pandemic. Our caucus has heard from small businesses looking for support to sustainably relaunch in a way that will let them not only survive but, in fact, thrive. Unfortunately, just like their overall pandemic response, this government has repeatedly chosen to respond at the last possible moment and to do the least possible.

While the incompetence of the UCP in the face of this pandemic meant that many businesses opened for a few months and then closed, only to have the government close them down with no warning again, and while the UCP offered condolences and not much else, our caucus called for easier eligibility for the relaunch

grant and two weeks of support for displaced workers. Restaurants built patios, only to have the government close them again, and the UCP's incompetence led Alberta to having the most active cases of COVID-19 per capita in North America. While the UCP offered nothing to support these businesses, we called for reimbursement for the costs of these renovations and a higher relaunch grant. The Premier ignored business owners that told him they were waiting months for their supports.

When small businesses want to know who had their back during this pandemic, they only need to look at the record. While the Premier and the jobs minister did the bare minimum, bragging about how generous their supports were, our caucus was actually listening to businesses and promising and proposing supports and policies to keep them strong both during and postpandemic. This Premier had an opportunity to support our vibrant business sector in a way that could see it thrive postpandemic and lead the country. Instead, he dawdled and stalled and did nothing. I urge this Premier to finally step up, listen to ideas which come from small businesses, and act. It's not too late for this Premier to act now and keep these businesses alive. Only time will tell if these were just mere empty words.

Thank you.

Provincial Reopening Plan

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, a short year and a half ago we embarked optimistically into our new decade with unbounded confidence towards our province's economy and way of life, only to fall victim not long thereafter to a virus and the whims of governments trying their very best to slow its spread. Fast-forward 15 months, and there isn't a single one of us who has not been impacted in some way by public health restrictions.

Since day one I have consistently advocated for the restoration of economic and financial freedom in our province on behalf of my constituents. I believe in self-determination, not the heavy hand of government. I believe that Albertans are responsible people who deserve to be the makers of their own destiny, and based on the thousands of e-mails and phone calls that I've received to my office, I know that the people of this province believe those things, too. That's why I'm so thrilled that Alberta will soon be reopening, wide open and before any other province in Canada. No more mandatory masking, no more social distancing, and no more limitations on living our lives to the fullest, freest extent. We will have a Calgary Stampede, we will have a CFL season, and we will throw house parties again.

Now, Mr. Speaker, our NDP opposition may whine and cry all they want to keep this province locked down forever, but here we won't do that. If the NDP want to live completely risk-averse lives, they are free to lock themselves in their houses and do so indefinitely, but in this province its people and its businesses are moving onward and putting COVID-19 behind us.

Mr. Speaker, we are Albertans. We are a self-determinant people, and facing adversity with confidence is in our DNA. No handout or government support can supplement a life, dream, or livelihood lost, and prolonged mass shutdowns have never been the solution. Embracing the true Albertan inside each and every one of us and taking a confident and optimistic step forward into our future as a province is.

So, Mr. Speaker, the time has come to relinquish our fears for a common belief that the best is yet to come, because together we can not only take charge of our destinies again, but we can pave a way for the rest of the world to see that life safely can and life safely must go on from here.

Live Events

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, in the year leading up to the pandemic the live experience sector contributed \$662.7 million to GDP and supported 14,580 jobs in Alberta, and it is a sector that has been one of the hardest hit. Depending on large gatherings to run, we have never reached a stage in any reopening plan that allowed for these venues to operate. In fact, since the beginning of the pandemic an estimated 16 live event venues in Alberta have shut down permanently, venues that are no longer available to support performers, provide jobs, and contribute to the economy.

But it didn't have to be this way. For more than a year live music venue operators throughout the province have been raising the alarm bells over the impact of ongoing closures on their businesses – I know because I have been getting the same communications as the minister – but it took this UCP government almost a year to offer any supports at all. You would have thought that with a timeline like that, the stabilize program announced earlier this year would have addressed the calls from industry and provided supports, operational costs for all operators, but you would be wrong. The program announced left out for-profit venues, and since that time the government has been saying: support for those venues is coming; just trust us. Mr. Speaker, I think you can guess where this is going. After much anticipation two weeks ago stabilize 2.0 was announced with no support for operational costs. For the for-profit businesses anything that comes now will be too late.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are hearing that these venues may soon have a chance to provide Albertans opportunities to experience live entertainment as vaccination rates increase. That is great news. The bad news is that many of these venues are already gone, and that lies solely with the UCP government.

Immunotherapy Treatment for Cancer

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, have you heard the news? CAR T-cell therapy has been approved for Albertans. This is wonderful because in 2020 alone we lost 475 Albertans to leukemia and lymphoma cancers. What is this wondrous new therapy? The basis of CAR T-cell therapy is that this immunotherapy, which enlists and strengthens the powers of a patient's immune system to attack these cancers, has emerged as a legitimate treatment to fight these horrendous diseases.

In 2015, Mr. Speaker, I fought for a constituent to get this therapy. I pleaded with the government of the day to consider a young man, Bo Cooper, a firefighter with the Fort McMurray fire department. He was the son of Robert and Carla Cooper, good friends of mine. He was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia several years earlier. At that time this life-saving treatment was only available in the United States, where the therapy was being investigated and researched. The application of the treatment, though, was almost \$900,000. My good friend and his family sold everything that they had in their possession to try to raise that money. Ultimately, the government at the time couldn't support an experimental treatment, nor could my good friends afford it. Bo passed away on November 6, 2016.

It's only six years later, and it's amazing to see the evolution in science and biotechnology as we learn to fight and defeat these cancers. More diseases and more formerly debilitating disease processes are being conquered by science. It's for reasons like this that my private member's bill cancelled former NDP legislation on blood products donation to support medical therapies like this, to enable access in order to do research and development of these life-saving therapies.

Trials for CAR T-cell therapy have demonstrated durable remissions and potential cures in about 50 per cent of adults and, impressively, 80 per cent of children and adolescents. This is expected to benefit approximately 150 Albertans over the next few years. CAR T-cell therapy is now approved at the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary, and additionally a clinical trial to develop a made-in-Alberta CAR T-cell therapy is under way at the Cross Cancer Institute. Amazingly, the cost of this is only \$54,000. This is very welcoming, but I only wish it had happened about six years earlier.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Residential School Deaths

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mass grave of 215 children discovered at a residential school site in B.C. has shaken Canadians from coast to coast. It is a heartbreaking and sobering reminder that Canada has still not confronted the legacy of trauma and abuse suffered by indigenous people. The Truth and Reconciliation calls to action demand that governments not only educate all citizens on the history and legacy of residential schools but also address serious gaps in health, education, justice, and social services for First Nations. To the Premier: can he advise this House what progress is being made on those issues?

Mr. Kenney: Thank you to the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the very important question. I know that all members, all Albertans have been horrified to learn with other Canadians and, in particular, members of our First Nations about the discovery of the graves of these 215 children as young as the age of three, children who were taken away from their families, never to return. Mr. Speaker, I have asked the minister of indigenous affairs to work with the Minister of Service Alberta to ensure full implementation of the relevant calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including the provision of any vital statistics which may be in our archives.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the TRC suggests that there were at least 821 deaths at residential schools in Alberta, but we don't know for sure because not enough has been done to seek a full accounting. Now, Albertans can't allow the deaths of children to remain undocumented, undiscovered, or forgotten. Should any request beyond just vital statistics come forward from indigenous groups to seek discovery, will the Premier agree to provide any and all resources necessary to find the remains of children in Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: Yes, of course. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Again, I thank the member for raising this important question. The royal commission on Indian residential schools reported 15 years ago. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported, I believe, six years ago. This discovery, I think, prompts all of us to see whether there are things that have been left undone, particularly with respect to unknown graves or unmarked graves. We are calling on the federal government to lead a program to discover those graves, and we'll assist in any way that we possibly can.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when the Premier was asked why children will no longer learn about these deaths until grade 5, he said that teaching an entire history of injustice and genocide in Canada was, quote, a terrible and distorted historical view. Now, while injustice

and genocide may not make up our entire history, it runs throughout it, and it must be acknowledged. Will the Premier commit to reconsidering his views on the curriculum so that students can learn about this history before grade 5, as asked by TRC?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the terrible injustice and tragedy of the Indian residential school system is a central factor of Canadian history that must be taught to students, including in elementary school. In the current curriculum the subject is not formally raised until grade 10. Under the new draft it would begin at grade 5, with at least 10 explicit mentions made of Indian residential schools, including seeking a recitation aloud of passages from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, studying accounts of survivors like those of former Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild, and a particular focus on the many terrible evils and injustices that occurred.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

Ms Notley: We're talking about before grade 5. But anyway, we'll keep pushing.

COVID-19 Contact Tracing

Ms Notley: As we reopen our economy, we must address areas where we fell short in managing the pandemic to ensure that our reopening is not jeopardized. Now, Mr. Speaker, one of those areas is contact tracing. The Premier and the Health minister repeatedly claimed in this House as early as October 27 that they had 800 contact tracers. Now, thanks to Global News, we have proof that this wasn't true. In fact, as cases exploded at the outset of the second wave, the real number was closer to 330. Why was this Premier incapable of being honest with Albertans about this issue?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can only inform the House based on the briefings I receive from the Health department, which I have no reason to believe are inaccurate or untrue. I can tell the member that both myself, the Minister of Health, and the Emergency Management Cabinet Committee had a very particular focus on expanding contact tracing capacity through the fall and into the winter, having been assured that there were at least 800 and capacity to expand beyond that, with the capacity to do upwards of 20,000 contact tracing investigations per day. Now, today, with under 300 cases, it's clearly the case that we have the capacity.

Ms Notley: "Pre-COVID we had 50 contact tracers; we now have 800." That's the Premier on November 3, Mr. Speaker. Global News shows that one day prior to that statement there were exactly 220 in place. That shortfall caused over 23,000 untraced cases in a month, where nearly 100,000 got COVID. Will the Premier please explain why he stood in this House and gave such profoundly incorrect information on a matter that was so serious? Was he mistaken, or did he hide the real numbers on purpose?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what I could tell you is that this government could not have been more clear in its direction to Alberta Health that cost was absolutely no barrier, that all resources were being made available, in fact, if anything, week after week of pressing Alberta Health to hire more people in the most creative ways possible to maximize the contact tracing capacity. All the NDP has ever done about this is heckle. What we did was to provide billions of dollars of additional resources to Alberta Health, and everything I've reported to this place is what I was briefed by Alberta Health.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, on November 25, when I asked the Premier why AHS couldn't account for the source of more than 85 per cent of new cases, the Premier said that we have "the strongest contact-tracing system in Canada." By December 7, when AHS reported that they need 2,264 tracers, only 244 were working. Will the Premier apologize to every Albertan who contracted COVID-19 in the second wave because of his failure to properly fund contact tracing? Also, will he hold accountable the minister who apparently enabled this inappropriate briefing?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the Leader of the Opposition is confusing full-time equivalents with many of the staff who were hired as part-time. Many of them were nurses working overtime, assisting the contact tracing team. What I can assure the – I'd be happy to go back and look at my briefing notes from November and December, but I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that the minister and the COVID cabinet committee directed Alberta Health to do everything humanly possible to maximize contact tracing capacity to the point where by the end of the year we were up to the ability to do 2,000 . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a question.

Education Funding and Curriculum

Ms Hoffman: The current government, under the leadership of the current Premier, has 2,000 fewer teachers and educational assistants than they did to support students prior to the pandemic. That's right; the government's own budget documents show that they've cut teachers and support staff when students need them more than ever. School jurisdictions are reporting that they're going to have to lay off even more staff in the upcoming year because the current government refuses to backfill their cuts. Why has the Premier failed to get kids the funding that they need to be successful?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the government of Alberta has provided hundreds of millions of dollars of additional support to schools to cope with COVID-19. We also appreciate, I think a portion of that, if I'm not mistaken, \$180 million of that having come from the federal government. Some of that funding was for the temporary pressure posed by the pandemic, which will not continue, thank God, next September. I would just point out that there was . . .

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

Ms Hoffman: Students are struggling, and the Premier should know that 20,000 more will be in school next year. That's what his own budget shows. That's on top of the 730,000 already there, who are getting less money each year than they did previously. Last week's announcement of funds was a drop in the bucket. The government has cut more than \$600 million from what kids were promised, and now they're giving back \$45 million of it. Imagine stealing \$600 million from Peter and expecting a pat on the back for giving \$45 million to Paul. Why did the Premier choose to give \$4.7 billion to corporations and at least \$1.2 billion on a gamble on the re-election of Donald Trump?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, we're back to that old canard.

Mr. Speaker, I have to correct myself. I inadvertently misled the House when I said that we've provided several hundred million dollars of support to schools to cope through COVID. In fact, it was a billion dollars in additional funding, including: \$120 million in

increased operational funding; \$250 million in accelerated capital maintenance funding, which included HVAC and ventilation upgrades; tens of millions of dollars for personal protective equipment; access to \$360 million in school board reserves, and much more support.

Ms Hoffman: Well, the Premier should apologize again, Mr. Speaker, because that was super misleading.

Taking \$10 million to give two masks to teachers and to students, taking federal money and having it replace less than half of what this Premier chose to cut, allowing boards to go into their own savings to have to backfill the hole that this Premier dug for them is appalling. Ninety-nine per cent of teachers voted no confidence in this Premier's minister; 95 per cent of principals have rejected the curriculum; none of Alberta's public, Catholic, or francophone schools have agreed to pilot the curriculum in its entirety. Thank goodness. Will this Premier finally admit that his minister has failed?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the budget for Education that we voted in this year, \$8.25 billion: that compares to the 2019 actual of \$8.13 billion. Only the NDP would count a \$140 million increase as a cut. Why do they need to make stuff up like this? Why do they need to try so obviously to mislead Albertans?

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: Can that member stand up and tell the truth, because it's right here in the budget?

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

Bill 70

Ms Sigurdson: COVID-19 has hit seniors in continuing care the hardest. Over 1,250 residents have died. This UCP government has failed to be proactive, did not do the work necessary to have adequate staffing and resources in these centres, and now the UCP's latest move of pure cruelty is to take away justice from families who have lost loved ones. The Minister of Health couldn't even bother to introduce this cruel bill himself, having the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek introduce it instead. Minister, will you withdraw this cruel bill right here and right now?

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order was noted at 2:01.
The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 70 follows the lead of several other provinces, including the New Democrat government in British Columbia, because if we do not provide for some minimal liability protection for basic negligence, then many of the nonprofit long-term care homes, continuing care homes are very likely to go bankrupt and be unable to provide any services to seniors who are in need, which would be a catastrophic problem in the pandemic. This is a responsible but very discreet action to protect our seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Today I was joined at a news conference by Kathy Kaiser, who lost her mom in an outbreak where staff were not wearing masks, proper cleaning was not taking place, and other protocols set out by AHS were not being followed. I was also joined by Shawna Larocque, whose mom was left to die alone in her room. Shawna begged for assistance and help as her mother drew her final breaths. Help never came. Both these women are part of active lawsuits, and Bill 70 will cut off their access to justice. How can the minister possibly justify cutting off families already seeking justice in the Alberta courts?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our heart goes out to all of those who've lost loved ones because of this pandemic. The action we are taking is designed to prevent additional deaths. If we lose thousands of long-term care beds due to bankruptcy because of lawsuits for basic negligence, that jeopardizes the lives of those seniors who are dependent on those places. People can continue to seek damages. They can continue to sue long-term care homes for gross negligence, but this bill has been endorsed by the Alberta Medical Association, Covenant Health, the Alberta Continuing Care Association, Alberta seniors and community housing association, and it follows the lead of six other Canadian provinces.

Ms Sigurdson: Many private operators increased profits during the pandemic while taking federal subsidies. This money should have gone to improving conditions for staff and residents, not boosting salaries for senior executives. I see these executives have also hired high-paid lobbyists to protect their profitable private companies. How much time has the minister spent meeting with lobbyists and representatives of private continuing care operations? In contrast, how much time has he spent meeting with grieving families who've lost loved ones, and does the minister recognize the devastating impact that robbing them of justice is having?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, we mourn with all families who have lost loved ones. In the real world we have a very real risk, which is why six governments, including a New Democrat government in British Columbia, have taken similar measures. In fact, Bill 70 is more limited, more discreet than the analogous legislation in those other provinces. It's there to avoid the bankruptcy and shutdown of particularly nonprofit and charitable long-term care homes, which would have a devastating impact and risk to the health of those seniors. We can't let that happen.

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

Provincial Reopening Plan

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many indicators are showing that the worst of the pandemic is behind us and that we will truly have an incredible summer. Hospitalizations have dropped below 450 and there are now less than 140 individuals in ICU, and these numbers continue to fall. Late last week Alberta crossed over the 60 per cent threshold of Albertans 12 and older receiving the vaccine. To the Minister of Health: can you please provide an update on these recent numbers and how they will impact Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there is much to be optimistic for here in Alberta. The active cases continue to trend downward and as of yesterday there were 446 people in hospital, which is a decrease of 32 people from the day before. ICU numbers have also decreased. I'm also happy to say that 62 per cent of Albertans who are 12 and older have had one dose of the vaccine and over 10 per cent of Albertans 12 or over have been fully vaccinated. So with over 2.75 million doses administered, we are a national leader in percentage of population fully vaccinated.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that we have seen such great progress in our vaccination program and that the pressure on our health system is easing and given that the open-for-summer plan states that

if we continue to see this progress, then we can move to stage 2 in just a few weeks, can the minister please provide an update on what Albertans can expect next in the weeks ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier and I announced last week, two weeks after the vaccination threshold of 60 per cent of Albertans is achieved and as long as hospitalizations stay under 500, stage 2 will begin. Some of the public health measures reduced at this stage include allowing outdoor gatherings of up to 20 and resuming indoor dining to a maximum of six people per table. Capacity for places of worship, indoor rec, entertainment, and retail will also be increased to one-third of the fire code capacity. Currently we're targeting June 10 to start stage 2.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that encouraging answer. Given that many Albertans are excited for the province to reopen and given that we have the most ambitious reopening plan in the entire country and given that the Premier and minister have laid out the plan for reopening, when we can reach stage 3, can the minister please remind the Assembly of what the thresholds for stage 3 are?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's open-for-summer plan has one clear threshold for stage 3, and that is that 70 per cent of Albertans who are eligible – that is, 12 or older – receiving their first dose of a vaccine. At this point in time we expect to be in stage 3 in early July. Stage 3 essentially eliminates all the public health measures except for the isolation requirements for confirmed cases of COVID and some protective measures in continuing care settings.

Residential School Deaths (continued)

Mr. Feehan: The horrific discovery of the remains of 215 children at a Kamloops residential school site has prompted widespread calls for action. There are six recommendations of the TRC that specifically address missing children and burial information. They include ensuring that all records of death of aboriginal children be made available to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, allocating sufficient resources to the national residential school student death registry, and maintaining an online registry of residential school cemeteries. Can the minister inform the House what specifically will be done to ensure that these are completed?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the very timely question. Actually, this morning I was on the phone with Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Marlene Poitras, and we were discussing working with the federal government to research the undocumented deaths and burials in residential schools. In speaking with the Premier, we will be moving forward with that and then looking at the funding part of it if we have to as well.

2:10

Mr. Feehan: Given that the TRC also calls for all families of children who died in residential schools to be informed of their burial locations and given that the TRC also calls for the

development of procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries, and it must be ensured that aboriginal communities lead these strategies and respect aboriginal protocols before any potentially invasive work, and given that the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations has called for an action plan to find all burial sites in Alberta, Minister, when can we expect an action plan on these critical matters?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has just happened, very shortly ago, so this is ongoing. We'll be working on it right out of the chute here, so we're moving forward right away. I had a conversation with a good friend of mine, past grand chief Willie Littlechild, and he was telling me about the residential school in Ermineskin, in Maskwacis area, where I'm from, and we're looking at helping him with doing some discoveries there and possibly a memorial of some type. We're working forward, and we will continue to move forward and make good progress on this as quickly as we can.

Mr. Feehan: Minister, we are certainly looking for action.

Given that Canadians will not accept the mass graves of children to be misidentified as anything other than what they are, unmistakable genocide, and given that indigenous leaders, advocates, historians, scholars, and others agree with the TRC conclusion that the residential school system amounted to cultural genocide and given that this Premier, his ministers, and his MLAs have avoided this important word, refusing to recognize residential schools in their legislation declaring April genocide awareness month, to the minister, my question is simple: why?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the revelations of last week were shocking to all of us, and clearly more needs to be done to identify the remains of other children who died while attending Indian residential schools in this terrible evil of our history. I would hope that we could do that in a nonpartisan way, setting aside the politics. The member opposite is criticizing the government for not having taken action, when he was the Minister of Indigenous Relations for the four years immediately following the publication of the truth and reconciliation report. I hope I don't have to remind him of that again in the future; instead, let us work together across party lines on this important matter.

Indigenous Children in Care

Ms Pancholi: The discovery of the unmarked graves of 215 indigenous children in B.C. is an important reminder that the horrors of residential schools are not just part of our history. The overrepresentation of indigenous children in child intervention is the direct result of the intergenerational trauma of residential schools. In 2018 the NDP released an action plan from the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention to reduce the overrepresentation of indigenous children in care; 16 of the 39 actions were implemented right away, yet the UCP refuses to publicly report on the progress of the remaining 23 actions. Will the Minister of Children's Services now provide a detailed update on the implementation of the action plan?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, in regard to the Kamloops residential school discovery there are truly no words to explain how devastating and heartbreaking this is. As the Minister of Indigenous Relations said, we have a moral obligation to do better. Our hearts

go out to the families of these children and everyone impacted by these shameful acts.

Resulting from the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, Children's Services continues work on redesigning the kinship care program, which will soon be complete.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the statistics are heartbreakingly clear that no improvement has been made in the child intervention system over the past two years and given that the number of children and youth who have died while in the child intervention system is going in the wrong direction, with a marked increase in deaths in indigenous children and particularly in young people aged 18 to 24, and given that there's been no change in the percentage of indigenous children in care – that rate is still at almost 70 per cent – to the minister: without public accountability on the action plan, the entire action plan, how can Albertans know if the lack of improvement is because the action plan isn't working or if it's because your government is not implementing it? Why won't you publicly report on the progress of . . .

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, many of the other recommendations from the MPCJ have been implemented, and our focus is now on supporting indigenous communities to care for their own children through agreements with the province and federal government. The Minister of Children's Services has and will continue to work with indigenous community partners to make sure recommendations are implemented, and we are continuously improving to serve vulnerable children and youth.

Ms Pancholi: There are 23 specific actions, Mr. Speaker, and given that those have not been publicly updated on and given that I and many in the NDP caucus attended the vigil last night at the Legislature for the 215 indigenous children who died alone, without their families, and without love in Kamloops and given that the message I heard loud and clear from indigenous survivors is that there can be no reconciliation without truth and given that transparency about the child intervention system – again, almost 70 per cent of children are indigenous in that system – is part of the uncomfortable but critical work of truth, what new actions will this minister commit to today to recognize the truth and move to real reconciliation and what new commitments?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Children's Services has continuously said that continuous improvement is essential in this work. For example, to prevent children from coming into care in the first place, more than 70 family resource networks across the province incorporate indigenous beliefs and approaches as well as being trauma informed in their services to help families build their skills and resiliency. Children's Services is also working collaboratively with Alberta's child advocacy centres to ensure front-line support for survivors of abuse and their families so that help is available when needed.

Flood Damage Mitigation Indigenous Relations Lesser Slave Lake Roads

Mr. Rehn: Mr. Speaker, last Friday Lesser Slave Lake was subjected to heavy rainfall which caused a number floods in the region, including floods impacting and closing some of our essential highways, causing delay and frustration for many who rely on these routes. Would the hon. minister of environment please provide the Legislature with his plans to prevent and mitigate flood impacts on our most essential infrastructure like our highways?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government takes flood mitigation seriously. One of the big things that we've done: this last year alone we've released more flood maps to communities than in the last 30 years inside this province, setting up communities with the information that they need to be able to protect themselves and to protect the infrastructure within their communities. We've also invested \$275 million over the last five years in the Alberta community resilience program, which has funded projects in 55 communities, when it comes to important flood mitigation projects all across the province. Those are just two examples of the important work that we're doing when it comes to mitigating floods inside our communities.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, given the recent heart-wrenching discovery of a burial site at the residential school in Kamloops and given that our society stands to be greatly enriched through full participation and engagement of indigenous peoples and given that indigenous peoples still face great barriers to prosperity and equality, can the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations please provide the Legislature with some of the ministry's initiatives to support indigenous peoples?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. There are no words to explain the heartbreaking situation that happened over the weekend. I think we were all shocked and saddened. The treatment of children and families that is part of the residential schools is a sad chapter in Canada's history, and that's why we need to work together with indigenous people in truth and reconciliation to move forward. Part of reconciliation is to partner with the indigenous people so that they can benefit from the land and grow in economic sustainability so that their communities can grow and thrive. That's why we've come up with the AIOC investment fund and employment partnership program.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that residents of Lesser Slave Lake have expressed concern about the condition of local highways even when they are not flooded and given that these highways serve a vital everyday role in connecting the communities within Lesser Slave Lake, can the hon. Minister of Infrastructure provide an update on the progress of highway improvements in Lesser Slave Lake?

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member that we have a number of projects going forward. The hon. member has been copied on, I dare say, many letters out of my office to folks on his local council and citizens that have asked about that, so I think he knows the answer to that question. Also, on the roads where we're not rebuilding and doing that, we've assured the hon. member's constituents that we have an active program to fill potholes and make other repairs with an emphasis on safety. I'd be happy to answer more if the hon. member wants to talk to me.

Speaker's Ruling Supplementary Questions

The Speaker: I might just provide a word of caution to the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake that, traditionally speaking, the

second question and the second supplemental have some direct link to the first question. I appreciate that a constituent may want to have known, but I'm not convinced that that link is enough to tie those three questions together.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

2:20 COVID-19 Contact Tracing
(continued)

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of Albertans have died during the COVID-19 pandemic and hundreds of thousands have been infected and left uncertain about long-term impacts on their health, yet the Premier and Health minister continue dodging accountability for their failings throughout the pandemic, including AHS data showing that they utterly failed to hire the number of contact tracers needed to handle the surge during the second wave. The Premier refused to explain why he insisted the system was robust even while it was quickly going under. To the Minister of Health: with 200,000 Albertans looking for work, how can we believe your government couldn't hire the contact tracers needed to protect and support Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to expand our contact tracing. In fact, Dr. Yiu, the CEO of AHS, recently said that AHS's contact tracers are contacting and investigating every COVID-19 case within 24 hours, as they've been doing since January. AHS has 2,500 case investigators and contact tracers, 50 times more than the 50 that they started off with in March 2020. Once again the NDP has nothing to add. They're fearmongering and falling flat because Albertans continue to see the reopening plan as well judged, and they want it to work.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that last fall, when they needed 2,000, AHS had 200 that were actually doing the work and given the accountability for the pandemic mismanagement of this government extends well beyond that and given that we know this government commissioned a formal review of its actions in the first wave last fall and promised a report would be available early this year and given that we're now five full months into the year and the report is still hidden from the public despite calls for it to be released, will the minister release the full review report of his government's actions in the first wave today? If not, what does his government have to hide, and why don't they feel the need to be accountable to Albertans?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, we have disclosed more information and more data than other provinces are, so let me correct the member as he keeps on trying to create this false narrative. The fact is that we are disclosing more. We are providing more information to Albertans. Before I answer the question on the review – and, yes, it will be released soon – the NDP seems to have missed that Dr. Yiu has recently announced, so I'll remind them, that AHS continues to contact and investigate all COVID-19 cases within 24 hours of receiving confirmation of the positive test result, and that's been happening since January 9. Within the last seven days their investigators have now reached new cases by phone within two to five hours 80 per cent of the time.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that we are talking about this government's failure on contact tracing, as shown in AHS documents last fall, and given that this government has been caught misleading Albertans about that in the second wave and that they're continuing to hide this report on their conduct in the first wave and

given that Albertans also deserve accountability on this third wave, where we had the highest COVID-19 case count in all of North America, which lies directly at the feet of this government, Minister, when will you launch a formal review into all of your actions in each wave of COVID-19, with consultation with Albertans and participation of the opposition?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we continue to talk about contact tracing, let's remember that that's just one of the ways that we are continuing to respond to the pandemic. Now, as every province, every country did have challenges during the spikes and their waves throughout the pandemic, as we did in November and December; however, they continued throughout AHS to complete case investigation and contact tracing throughout that second wave. We're looking forward to continuing any further reviews that are going to continue to be done to update our pandemic plan because it's not going to make the NDP very happy to continue to show that we're national leaders in our response.

Supervised Drug Consumption Sites

Ms Sigurdson: In June 2017 our government stood beside AHS, the city of Calgary, Calgary police, and the local residents association to open supervised consumption services at Sheldon Chumir, a response to the overdose crisis that saved lives. Over this government's two years in power the death rate has more than doubled: 1,316 deaths last year and already another 238 reported in the first two months of this year. In this context, why is the government closing life-saving supervised consumption services at the Sheldon Chumir centre?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the NDP want to believe, the government is not shutting down supervised consumption sites or services in Calgary. We are expanding them. We will close the drug site at the Sheldon Chumir centre and instead add two CSSs at existing partner locations or organization sites that are already able to serve individuals suffering from addiction. The NDP's chosen location for the site resulted in a huge amount of social disorder for the Beltline. This was unacceptable, and those who live and work in the Beltline made that very clear to government.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that we welcome the opening of additional sites – but that doesn't mean the Chumir needs to close – and given that our government was in the process of opening additional sites in Calgary, a process this government halted, and given that additional sites would offer help to more Calgarians and save lives, will the minister admit that halting the expansion of safe consumption sites in Calgary was a deadly mistake, and will he tell this House where these two new sites will be located and when they will become operational?

Mr. Shandro: I'm very pleased to hear the NDP admit that they were being untruthful before, Mr. Speaker. We are opening two sites. We are expanding supervised consumption services in Calgary. We are building a full continuum of care for people that are struggling with addiction, and that includes services to reduce harm and services to support recovery. Unlike the previous NDP government, which was single-mindedly focused on facilitating dangerous drug use, we have dramatically expanded services to help get people with an addiction illness off these dangerous drugs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. Oh, my apologies. I'm sorry. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that this government's refusal to listen to public health advice has been well documented throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and given that public health experts in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world all agree that supervised consumption saves lives and given that four – four, Mr. Speaker – Albertans die of a preventable overdose every single day here in Alberta, will the minister commit that he will not close any more of these services and instead expand them to spare more Alberta families the loss of a loved one?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member admitted herself in her first supplemental, we are expanding the supervised consumption services in Calgary, but on top of that – we're not just doing that. We are going to continue to include harm reduction as part of our response to addiction. We are going to have a full continuum of care. That's what they find dangerous, that not only are we going to continue to provide harm reduction services, but we are going to provide a full continuum of care to provide opportunities for recovery for patients in this province.

The Speaker: Now it's time for the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Provincial Reopening Plan and Sports Activities

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 26 Alberta's government announced Alberta's plan to reopen the province and gradually lift restrictions based on common sense and scientific evidence. This affects businesses, services, gatherings, and physical activities. Many of my constituents in Cardston-Siksika have been asking when sports are allowed to get back to normal as physical activity is vital for all Albertans' physical and mental health. To the Minister of Health: what types of sports are allowed to resume tomorrow, June 1?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member in particular for being a persistent advocate for kids' sports throughout the province and, in particular, in his communities. Under stage 1 any sport, recreation, or performance activity that can be done outdoors with two metres' distancing to a maximum of 10 people of all ages will begin, so any outdoor sport where distancing is possible – that could be golf; that could be tennis, pickle-ball – will be allowed. Outdoor training and practices can also take place for teams up to a maximum of 10 people when proper distancing can be provided.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that children and youth sports have been highly impacted by COVID-19, with team sports basically unable to happen, and given that team sports are very important for character development in children and given that children under 12 are not able to receive a COVID-19 vaccine but have only accounted for less than 2 per cent of total COVID patients in hospitals in Canada, to the same minister: when can children and youth expect to be able to play team sports, including games against other teams, without restrictions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Under stage 2, which could be in place on June 10 as long as hospitalization trends continue to stay below 500, indoor and outdoor youth sports, rec and performance activities can incorporate game play. While

there would be no masking or restriction during games, guidance would require masking before and after games and restrict gatherings before and after games. Once we move into stage 3, this guidance would be removed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:30

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that sports are embedded in Canadian culture and given that they can be celebrated in ways such as attending basketball games and rodeos and given that large summer events such as local rodeos, the Calgary Stampede, baseball games, et cetera are one of the best ways to spend summer and great ways to generate revenue for local businesses and communities, to the same minister: when can fans be able to watch their favourite sports teams or events such as pro football games or rodeo in live stadiums?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Albertans are excited to watch their favourite athletes play, their favourite teams play. I know that I am. We're currently expecting to reach stage 2, as I said, on June 10, which is exciting news for Alberta. During this stage outdoor facilities will be able to allow to fill their seats to one-third of their capacity. Now, once 70 per cent of Albertans who are eligible for a vaccine – that's 12 and older – have received that vaccine, we'll be able to enter stage 3, and this would allow fans in both indoor and outdoor facilities to come and watch with no limits.

Community Organization Funding

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, 30 per cent of community associations in Calgary are facing an uncertain future as they grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, a massive hit to their revenue, and no government supports. These associations are the heart of our communities and provide everything from seniors' programs to places to play hockey and soccer. Some have lost over 50 per cent of their revenue. This is devastating. We need action. Why has the minister offered nothing to support these vital community groups?

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a wide variety of supports available to businesses and organizations by our government and by the federal government. The member is right in that community associations probably don't qualify for all of those, but we'll continue to work with the municipalities and hear what they have to say. Like I said, typically the municipalities work with the community associations, and we work with the municipalities. We'll continue to stay in touch.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this government has reduced the community facility enhancement program by over \$43 million in just two years, leaving community associations with less than half of the money needed to maintain public-use facilities, and given that these volunteer-run community associations rely on provincial funding to match dollars they fund raise and given that fundraising has been difficult due to the pandemic, will the minister reinstate the money the government took away from the community facility enhancement program? Is now really the time to be levelling massive cuts onto community associations?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with municipalities. We'll continue to stay in touch with the community associations. Listen, the hon. member talks about a real problem, but what he continues to ignore is the fact that we've got an \$18 billion deficit this year. The one thing that will allow us to provide ongoing support for municipalities into the future is getting our budget house in order, something that the other side wouldn't do. We can't continue doing this till we can't help anybody. We are trying to walk that line between supporting everybody we can and serving the taxpayers as responsibly . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Given that community associations only receive money from grants, rentals, and casinos and the government is making changes to casino eligibility, which has caused fear for many community associations, and given that when asked in March, the Minister of Finance evaded the question about casino eligibility changes, can he commit here and now that nothing – nothing – will change when it comes to the funding community associations are able to raise through casinos?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe, as the hon. Finance minister said, nothing has changed yet. In terms of what changes the minister has planned in the future, I cannot say. But he'll be well aware that many groups, including community groups, are dependent upon the revenue from gaming, from casinos, from lottery tickets, and other things. I'll make sure that the hon. minister is aware of that, and I'm sure he will make responsible decisions, as he always does.

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

Economic Recovery and Central Alberta

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Red Deer is facing an unemployment rate of nearly 10 per cent, and 91 small and medium-sized businesses closed their doors for good in 2021. This government pledged to create jobs and grow the economy, but we lost 50,000 jobs province-wide before the COVID-19 pandemic even began. Currently 200,000 Albertans find themselves looking for work, including so many in Red Deer. To the minister of economic development: explain to the people of that city and all of central Alberta why this government's so-called economic plan has been such a disaster.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the hon. member that Alberta's government is investing in getting Albertans back to work. A bold investment of up to \$370 million will support hiring unemployed Albertans into thousands of jobs and protect lives and livelihoods at the same time. The Alberta jobs now program will help reduce the cost of hiring and training unemployed Albertans for jobs. With Alberta jobs now program funding employers can expand their business and give Alberta workers the skills they need to be successful. This is just a part of what we are doing for people that need jobs.

Ms Sweet: The no jobs now plan, Mr. Speaker.

Given that last week I joined the deputy leader and the chair of our economic committee and our Transportation critic for a conversation on the economic future of Red Deer and given that we heard loud and clear from small-business owners on that call that the supports from this government haven't even come close to addressing the challenges in Red Deer and given that while this minister loves to puff up his chest and boast that the government's

small-business support package is the best in the country, the evidence indicates anything but, Minister, 91 businesses closed in Red Deer this year. How has this government let that happen?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, this government has been fighting for every small business and every employee in Alberta since this pandemic started. As you know, it's a world-wide economic disaster, but our supports have been the best available, we believe, anywhere. We're not finished yet. We're projected to have the most investment and economic growth in the next year in Canada. We think that's a sign that we're on the right track, but we're not done. If we have to do more, we will look at that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister of agriculture fancies himself as being a real farmer and given that he's an MLA representing the central Alberta region and that that should give him personal investment in seeing the area thrive but given that the minister couldn't even bother to access the free federal money to support farmers and ranchers through the AgriStability agreement and given that this government slashed vital funding for agricultural research and development, does the minister even understand the central Alberta region and what he is supposed to be representing? If he actually does, then why hasn't he advocated to his colleagues to support the job creation and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has been working very hard on the AgriStability program. Make no mistake, this government stands behind Alberta farmers. In my opinion, there's nobody better than the minister of agriculture to be looking out for the interests of Alberta farmers. But what's important, when we talk about AgriStability, is making sure that this is a program that is going to work for all farmers and not just for the 3.6 per cent of Alberta producers who benefit from the current program. There's a lot of work that the minister continues to do, and I'm confident that he's headed in the right direction.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont is next.

Support for Small and Medium-sized Businesses

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small businesses, like those in Leduc and Beaumont, are bearing the brunt of public health restrictions. They have lost revenue, employees, and jobs. They've closed their doors, and some will never open again. The Alberta government has committed to providing critical and immediate support to businesses negatively affected by the most recent public health orders. Can the minister inform this House what supports are currently being offered to small businesses during this time?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. Our government has provided more than a billion dollars in support to small businesses through our small and medium enterprise relaunch grant. We have received more than 100,000 applications for that relaunch grant. In the third round of funding Alberta's government has already paid out more than \$40 million to businesses that have applied. The program is still open, so businesses that are listening out there that haven't applied yet, if they think they can benefit from this: my suggestion is that they go online and do that right away. We want to help.

2:40

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, given that bold actions are needed to help struggling businesses and get unemployed Albertans back to work and that the Alberta government recently launched the jobs now program to help and encourage businesses in hiring and training new employees, can the minister inform the House how much interest the jobs now program has received since it was announced?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier, we're still providing the relaunch grant to small businesses affected by public health orders. We extended our pause on collecting the tourism levy, which will provide a total of \$40 million in relief to hospitality and accommodation providers. The Minister of Labour and Immigration has also introduced the jobs now program, which the hon. member has mentioned. It's the largest training and retraining program in Alberta's history to help Alberta's businesses and create tens of thousands of jobs. These are all things that members on the other side should pay attention to as well, because they seem unaware.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta government is introducing a new program aimed at creating jobs by encouraging Alberta businesses to hire Albertans, can the minister inform this House if any other provinces have similar programs and if those programs have been successful?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll speak more about our province. Restaurants and hospitality businesses have been the largest recipients of funding under the relaunch grant, and they can still apply for up to \$10,000 if they haven't received anything, but the best thing that we can do for restaurants is to let them reopen. Unlike the folks across, that would have us locked down until who knows when and would have had us locked down since who knows when, those restaurants and businesses have been open way more under this UCP government than they would have been under an NDP government because – you know what? – we'll keep helping restaurants and the hospitality industry, but they'd rather help themselves, because that's what they do.

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 Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Trust in Government

Mr. Nielsen: As elected officials it's critical that when people raise concerns, it's important to take the time and, in the case of this Premier, take out his earplugs, and listen thoughtfully. Over the weekend we asked Albertans on social media what message they would like to share with the Premier. Well, we got more than a couple of responses.

Kara wrote to the Premier saying: my husband and I will not be teaching your curriculum and would never subject our children to it. Jenelle's message to the Premier was that health care workers need help; just because the third wave has crested does not mean

our work will stop. Chris' message to the Premier was simple. He wanted to know what the disability community had done to make this Premier and government target them so much, with cuts to AISH and changes to payment days and more. Verlean's message is one that a lot of people have been asking. When will an inquiry committee be set up to investigate the absolutely incompetent response of our government to a virus?

Many more messages I couldn't hope to share in just two minutes, but to these Albertans who wrote in, please keep writing in to the Premier. He might not care, but we will make sure that he hears every single word. I know that the go-to response from the UCP is to ignore any criticism, and if it persists, dismiss the critics as a special-interest group. Albertans see through this spin, and frankly it's an embarrassing response.

To the people of this province: do not trust this Premier and do not trust the UCP. On everything from parks to the curriculum, from the deficit to the pandemic Albertans do not believe a word that this Premier says. If he had any interest in regaining the trust of Albertans, he could start by listening and responding to the messages that we have given him here today, or he could keep talking down to and trying to mislead Albertans. We'll only tell which path he chooses. I suspect that in two years' time he will not be in this chair that he is in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River is next.

Polish Heritage in Canada

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on a nonpartisan note to honour Albertans of Polish heritage, who have done so much dedicating themselves to this great province. Alberta is home to Canada's second-largest population of Polish heritage, and there is no question that every facet of our society today is impacted by their tremendous contributions.

As members are aware, for over a century Poland did not exist on a map of the world. Numerous partitions by other nations progressively reduced Poland until it ceased to exist in its entirety. Only at the end of World War I did Poland return to its rightful place as a nation state. Unfortunately, subsequently Poland and its people had to suffer through Hitler's unspeakable tyranny and Stalin's imposition of dictatorial Communist rule. But the free spirit and determination of Poles prevailed, and after partial free elections in 1989 a free Poland became a member of NATO and the European Union.

This free spirit and determination, grounded in a strong faith in God, commitment to family, and desire for freedom, are the cornerstones of the foundation that all of us in Alberta benefit from today. Whether it was the sugar beet fields in southern Alberta or the coal mines of Crowsnest Pass or the community halls and churches built by Polish pioneers in our prairie lands, across this whole province the Polish community has contributed greatly to this province. One example is that North America's only Polish bilingual school, that we have named after John Paul II, is right here in Edmonton.

When we look at the accomplishments of Canadians of Polish heritage, it is easy to understand why our province is such a wonderful place. Mr. Speaker, the beautiful monument located on the western edge of our Legislature Grounds speaks to five waves of Polish immigration to our province. One of those waves included my grandparents on my mother's side. This event we have to unveil is now set for later this summer, and I encourage all to celebrate that special time in Polish heritage.

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

Racism

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Zaheera Tariq and her son were physically attacked in Calgary at a C-Train station. Her son was pushed up against the wall, and the attacker tried to grab her hijab. This comes just two days after a Palestinian man was verbally attacked while driving in Calgary. The attacker forced Tamer Abu Hassira to stop his vehicle in the middle of the traffic, damaged his vehicle, and launched a series of Islamophobic slurs. The video is disturbing to watch, and we worry about what might have happened to the man if he was forced out of his vehicle.

But these are far from isolated incidents. We saw a series of racist attacks on black Muslim women just a couple of months ago, throughout the pandemic we have also seen the rise in anti-Asian hate, and just weeks ago Nazi flags were seen flying in Alberta, with one of the owners refusing to take it down. Mr. Speaker, racism is on the rise in Alberta. We need more than empty promises and lip service to address it; we need action.

Our government was proud to create the Anti-Racism Advisory Council to provide advice on efforts to combat racism in Alberta. Unfortunately, the work of the council has been stalled by this UCP government. The council has written a final report with recommendations. It hasn't been released. Similarly, our motion to denounce and ban racist and hateful symbols and imagery in public spaces was passed by this Assembly, but once again there has been no follow-through from this government. People of colour continue to live in fear, and that fear only grows as more of these attacks and displays of racist and hateful symbols continue.

Mr. Speaker, if we want to build an inclusive province, we need to act, and the time to act is now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Preserving Canada's Economic Prosperity Act

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am proud to stand in this House to talk about Bill 72, the Preserving Canada's Economic Prosperity Act. This is an excellent piece of legislation that ensures that we receive maximum value for our crude oil and natural gas products. It also gives our province the power to defend our economic interests from those who would attempt to block our progress with respect to our energy industry. Provinces like Quebec and British Columbia, who like to stand on their soapboxes and wholeheartedly condemn our energy industry as they try to stall our progress and shut down our energy sector, will no longer be able to do so without repercussions.

2:50

The Premier of Quebec once denounced our oil and gas sector by referring to it as, quote, dirty oil. End quote. We will see how dirty he thinks it is when the taps of his province get shut off in the winter and they cannot heat their homes. We will see how dirty he thinks it is when the price of gas skyrockets and people cannot drive their vehicles. Quebec and British Columbia will have to cease their virtue signalling and constant pushing back against our energy sector if they want to continue reaping the amazing benefits that Alberta oil and gas affords their provinces.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our Energy minister for all the hard work she has done to make this bill a reality. The development of our oil and gas sector will no longer be at the mercy of antienergy, anti-Alberta efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) acknowledge the implications for indigenous people of Alberta of the recent discovery of the remains of the bodies of an estimated 215 children at the site of the Kamloops residential school; (b) recognize that one-fifth of child deaths, over 800, at residential schools in Canada took place in Alberta; (c) condemn the horrific loss of life of indigenous children; (d) acknowledge that the government of Alberta has supports and resources it can contribute to assist families who continue to experience trauma from the loss and death of their loved ones at residential schools; and (e) urge the government of Alberta to take immediate and effective action to assist communities to identify similar burial sites in respect of more than 800 children who died at residential schools in Alberta.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Pharmacy 2020 annual report, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta 2019-2020 annual report, and the College of Naturopathic Doctors of Alberta annual report 2020.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:01 the opposition deputy House leader called a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise because at 2:01 p.m., without the benefit of the Blues, I believe the Premier said something along the lines of "The hon. member insists on not telling the truth," in referring to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora directly. The Premier then went on to say: why does the NDP feel the need to mislead Albertans?

Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate that many times we speak generally about misleading Albertans – certainly, we would not, obviously, in this place – to accuse an individual member of not telling the truth while in the Chamber I think certainly crosses into a point of order, as you've given guidance on in the past.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Premier said no such thing. I assume you have the Blues already, but according to my transcript the Premier said, "Why do they need to try so obviously to mislead Albertans?" First off, this is not a point of order. Second, to the Deputy Opposition House Leader: if they're concerned about using the word "misleading," I certainly would encourage them to talk to their caucus.

I'll give you a couple of examples from today. From the Member for Edmonton-Glenora: will the Premier apologize again? Again, referring directly to the Premier. The Premier, I want to point out, did not refer to any member in this Chamber. "Well, the Premier should apologize again, Mr. Speaker, because that was super misleading." Or from the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona: "Why was this Premier incapable of being honest with Albertans about this issue?" Or from the Member for Edmonton-Decore today: the Premier is misleading Albertans. Direct quote. Or from the Member

for Edmonton-Centre: “This government has been caught misleading Albertans.”

Those are just a couple of examples yet today. While I do think, Mr. Speaker, that we should avoid going out of our way to say that we are misleading people, we definitely should not be referring specifically to members, as the members across the way, unfortunately, have been throughout this question period. It is very clear that the Premier did not refer to a member and very clear that he was not directly accusing any member of this House of misleading the House, unlike what the Official Opposition did throughout question period today.

The Speaker: Thank you for your submissions. I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I would like to provide some caution to members of the opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, in asking the question, said: “Well, the Premier should apologize again, Mr. Speaker, because that was super misleading.” She goes on to ask the rest of the question. The Premier’s response, which is the subject of the point of order that was raised: “Why do they need to try so obviously to mislead Albertans?”

I’d like to draw the attention of all members to rulings from April 8, 2021, when the Speaker said: “Members’ Statements as well.” I think I’ll maybe provide caution to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who did in fact say that the Premier was misleading Albertans.

When we use language like “a group of members are deliberately misleading” . . .

or that others are misleading,

last week . . . I ruled the word “lying” out of order. So while at this point in time, on this particular point of order – and I think that perhaps I’ll take a slightly different position on subsequent points of order that we hear this afternoon.

We may need to proceed to as well rule this out of order. I don’t want to become the Speaker of a giant list of things that members continually try to push the boundaries on, but certainly, if members of the Assembly should be apologizing today, it is members of the opposition, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. However, I think that we can take this as an opportunity to be reflective about the words that we say. This is certainly not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South, at the appropriate time, rose on a notice of motion to provide notice for a Standing Order 42. I will provide a reminder to that member that the purpose of his remarks is to be focused on the urgency of the debate and why the House should set aside the other business before the Assembly to proceed immediately to the motion other than a government motion. I will ask him to keep his comments as concise and specific to urgency as possible.

Residential School Deaths

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a motion in regard to a matter that is urgent and pressing. The motion, which I did read earlier under Notices of Motions, has been distributed to all members of the Assembly through this process and, I believe, has been distributed electronically to the table as well.

Further, Mr. Speaker, while a motion under Standing Order 42 requires no notice, my office did provide advance notice to your office of my intention to introduce a motion under the appropriate

standing order as per previous Speakers’ memos. As my colleagues have frequently pointed out, SO 42 is an opportunity for all members of this Assembly, specifically the private members of the Assembly, to ensure that matters that are important to constituents are debated and addressed in this House.

Now, allow me to briefly outline why this motion and its outcome are urgent and pressing today. Mr. Speaker, the last time we sat together in this Assembly was last Thursday, May 27, 2021. On that same day the remains of an estimated 215 children were uncovered at a burial site at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia. The loss of 215 children in and of itself urgently demands us to acknowledge the loss and to mourn. It requires us to support loving families and kin.

Moreover, the debate is urgent in Alberta because this is not a faraway problem. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported what families in Alberta have known and have told us since the start of residential schools, that children died there and, Mr. Speaker, that they were also unceremoniously buried there, often without the knowledge of their parents or the ability of their parents to mourn. As any parent will tell you, this is a matter of urgent concern, and as indigenous communities and parents have been telling us for decades, this is a matter of urgent concern.

The TRC estimated that one-fifth of child deaths in residential schools happened in Alberta, likely well over 800 children in this province. Families, including in Alberta, have had no answers, no peace, no proper ceremony to grieve, or process for justice. There are resources that the government of Alberta can immediately provide to support indigenous-led efforts to identify gravesites and child deaths.

I’m urging the Assembly to make this issue, the loss of children and the ongoing suffering and trauma faced by indigenous communities, the most pressing issue in our business today. For this reason, we are asking the Assembly to grant unanimous consent to adjourn the ordinary business of the House and debate this pressing matter.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to the Standing Order 42 changes that were made effective May 26, 2021, a response may be given to a request for an SO 42 not exceeding five minutes. It appears that the hon. the Government House Leader will provide that response.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not use the full five minutes, but I do appreciate the opportunity. First of all, I want to thank the Official Opposition for bringing forward this motion. I also want to thank the Minister of Indigenous Relations earlier today for his important ministerial statement and you, Mr. Speaker, for taking the time at the beginning of our session today for a prayer as well as a moment of silence recognizing what is really a horrific situation, that all of us have come to realize over the weekend.

It should come as no surprise to you, Mr. Speaker, that of course I would encourage all members of the Assembly to agree to this debate and that it is a good use of our time this afternoon to discuss this important issue inside this Chamber. Further to that, I would anticipate, after I’ve had some conversations with the Minister of Indigenous Relations today, that strongly the government does not feel the Official Opposition’s motion goes far enough. While it is good, we think it falls well short. The House can anticipate that we will be bringing forward amendments to strengthen it during that debate.

We do certainly appreciate the opportunity, and again I want to encourage all members of the House to take this opportunity for this

important debate and thank the Official Opposition for the opportunity.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a request for Standing Order 42 requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We will dispose of the regular business of the Assembly until the debate has concluded. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South will now move the motion. Members have up to 20 minutes to speak to the motion, and Standing Order 29(2)(a) is not available for any portion of the debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) acknowledge the implications for indigenous people of Alberta of the recent discovery of the remains of the bodies of an estimated 215 children at the site of the Kamloops residential school; (b) recognize that one-fifth of child deaths, over 800, at residential schools in Canada took place in Alberta; (c) condemn the horrific loss of life of indigenous children; (d) acknowledge that the government of Alberta has supports and resources it can contribute to assist families who continue to experience trauma from the loss and death of their loved ones at residential schools; and (e) urge the government of Alberta to take immediate and effective action to assist communities to identify similar burial sites in respect of more than 800 children who died at residential schools in Alberta.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to Standing Order 42, where we are remembering and acknowledging the implications for indigenous people across this province and indeed, I believe, across this country on this substantive matter where 215 children were found at the site of the Kamloops residential school in British Columbia. As I mentioned slightly earlier while speaking to urgency, one-fifth of child deaths, over 800, at residential schools in Canada occurred here in Alberta. It's horrific that we have to hear these numbers and say these words in this place. It's horrific that we have to think about the implications, the families that were impacted.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Before I go much further into my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, who was the former Minister of Indigenous Relations here in Alberta, who did a considerable amount of work implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who did a considerable amount of work in guiding this province when he was minister and gave me considerable context on how we should be impacted and how we should be acting in these difficult times.

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that when we see this type of discovery in our province, this is nothing new, right? It's something that we report and we see reported as a new discovery of a site of 215 people. I don't think that the families of 215 children who did not come home, the families of over 800 children in Alberta who did not come home, the families of thousands of people across this country who did not come home would consider this new information.

Instead, I think of it as something that is clearly a tragedy and a horrific loss of life, that we must take here today and realize that we did not do enough. We do not do enough, and we must do better. Mr. Speaker, it's everywhere that we must do better. It's not just in the words we say today, it's not just in the motions we move today and the speeches we make today, but indeed it's in everything we

do. When we're talking about how we implement health care in this province or about how we implement curriculum in this province, how we implement education, how we implement policy in this province, we must do better every single day. We must recognize the impacts every single day.

We must recognize the loss of life every single day. We must mourn every single day because it simply is not enough that now that we see these graves, now that we have found children, we are having this debate. It simply is not enough that now is when it has become urgent for us in this place because, again, Mr. Speaker, as the families of thousands of indigenous children who did not come home will tell you, every single day they remember. They know; they've known. That we are just finding out in this place today and that we're just debating this today is in itself a failure. I think that we have failed as legislators, we have failed as decision-makers, we have failed as policy-makers, we have failed as politicians because, frankly, these families have had no answers and no peace for decades, and that simply is not good enough. It simply is not good enough.

That's why it's so important that the government of Alberta provide the resources and supports that it can, provide the resources and supports that it has available, whether that means that some communities may want to go and find these sites and some communities may not. But whatever it is the communities want, we need to listen, and we need to hear, and we need to understand. We need to go out and provide and offer the supports that we can, but we need to be respectful, and we need to understand that every single person and every single community will mourn differently.

Mr. Speaker, I think that I want to give the opportunity for my colleagues to speak to this. I know that many members in this place were moved very deeply, and I know that many of members of this place, including members of the opposition, attended a vigil yesterday here outside the Legislature, where I believe there were hundreds if not thousands of people assembled to mourn together. So I hope that we can hear from many more of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

And I want to thank the government for allowing us to proceed with this debate. I think it's something that is a good first step. It's something that we believe will allow us to have the first move forward, Mr. Speaker, but as I said, again, it's simply not enough when we do lip service. It's not enough that we have this debate today. We have to take these calls to action. We have to take this as a wake-up call because the last ones weren't enough. We need a wake-up call today that says that it's not okay to have a racist curriculum, it's not okay to have a racist health care system, it's not okay to have a racist justice system. We need a system that works, that acts in the spirit of reconciliation, and we need a system that will actually support indigenous people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing from my colleagues today, and I urge all members of the Assembly to in the strongest terms support this motion and join me in mourning for the 215 children that were found at the Kamloops residential school.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Prior to looking for other members to speak, I just want to confirm that you did move the motion under Standing Order 42.

Mr. Dang: Yup.

The Acting Speaker: You did. Okay. Perfect. I just didn't hear it, but that's fine.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations has risen.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is definitely a tough subject for me to talk on, but I'll do my best. I spent a lot of the weekend talking with a lot of my friends and just doing a lot of soul-searching as to how we could approach this, and what they suggested is to just speak from my heart. It's so important that the voices of those that didn't come home have a voice, so I'll try to be that voice for them.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, that you're sitting in your home. There's a knock on the door. Someone shows up and says: I'm taking your son. You don't understand the language that well, and they're taking your son. "Why are you taking my son?" "We're taking him to school; you have to learn; you have to learn the ways, learn a new culture, learn a new language." You have no choice but to let them take your child. You don't know if he's coming back. You don't know where they've taken him. As a father and a grandfather I can't even comprehend it, what I would do.

3:10

These children were taken, taken off to a school. They didn't know the language. If they spoke in their language – and I saw this happen in my own school. If they spoke in Cree in my school, they were strapped. I don't mean just strapped. They were little old ladies, but they were tough. They had a strap, and they would strap us for everything. If we made too many spelling mistakes in a book, we'd get a strap. If the indigenous kids spoke their language, they would get a strap, and I don't mean just one hit. You'd get strapped hard. That was just in the regular school, so you can imagine what went on in the residential schools, these poor kids all by themselves, not knowing what's happening, just beating their culture out of them, Mr. Speaker. What a terrifying experience. And then to have, on top of that, some people in there that are just evil people that are doing unmentionable things to these poor kids and some of them actually losing their lives. What a terrible time in our history.

But I think what's important from that is that we have to come together. We have to grieve, and we have to heal, and we have to find a way to come through this because the indigenous people aren't going anywhere; we're not going anywhere. We have to work together, and we have to grieve, and we have to learn, and we have to heal, Mr. Speaker. That's what last night was about. There was a nice vigil. There were a lot of indigenous people, but there were a lot of other people there as well in support of it. It was a really nice vigil. There'll be another one there tonight. I know there's one happening in my area at Maskwacis. There's another one happening in Calgary. You'll see the shoes starting to line up in front of these memorials, and those shoes represent the kids that didn't come home. What a powerful message that sends.

Mr. Speaker, I've been across the province, been lucky to visit a lot of areas. I was at what they call Blue Quills community college. It's a nice college there, and they're teaching all sorts of things. The lady that showed us around was a student there when it was a residential school, and she told us many horrifying stories. I don't know how she was able to do it, but she was able to relate to us the stories of when she was a child going to the school there and how kids – if you went across the line, there was an electric fence, and that was worth a beating if you made it back, and one of her friends was pushed out of a two-storey balcony. Just horrendous stories. But she's so strong and so powerful. It was just an honour to be with her and hear all these stories that she regaled to us. You know, as a kid you'd heard about the residential schools, but you didn't really realize. You just thought: well, they just went off to school; what's the problem? But it wasn't just going off to school.

Then at the Poundmaker's Lodge very close to Edmonton, in St. Albert, they have an addiction treatment centre, Mr. Speaker, and we've been funding it. We've actually doubled the size of that

addiction treatment centre there. Beside the treatment centre is another residential school. Again, one of the people at one of the events I was at there told us of the many things that happened at that residential school. We were looking at maybe adding on to the Poundmaker's, but he says, "You can't build here, and you can't build there because there's a grave here and a grave there." I'm saying, "What do you mean, there are graves?" Then you start hearing more and more of the stories and realizing what was going on, and it's just heartbreaking.

One of my good friends from Maskwacis went to the Ermineskin residential school, and I've been with him many times when he's been speaking. He's an amazing orator, past Grand Chief Willie Littlechild. He tells about the residential schools, and he tells it in a way that – you're listening to him speak, and you're thinking: oh, my God; he's telling us true stories of what happened to him as a child and being taken from his family. If you didn't get back in time at Christmas, then the next year you didn't even get to go home at Christmas. I can't imagine. Like, your kids are gone; they can't even go home for Christmas? What a crazy thing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that we're having this debate today. It gives us the opportunity to discuss this important issue. Alberta was home to over 30 per cent, I believe, of the residential schools across Canada, so it's a big issue for us. That's why I'd like to propose an amendment to just add a little more meat to the bone on the motion that's ahead of us here.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, similar to the routine of amendments in Committee of the Whole, all members who would like to receive a copy of the amendment, please raise your hand. There will also be copies of the amendments at the tables. For those of you on the way back, understand that the page is going to come here first. Once I've had a chance to take a look at it, I'll have some more instructions on that.

If the hon. minister could please read the amendment in for the record and for the benefit of all those listening and then please continue with your remarks, with about 13 and a half minutes remaining.

Mr. Wilson: I would need a copy. I gave them all to you. Sorry.

The Acting Speaker: Please go ahead.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion moved by the Member for Edmonton-South pursuant to Standing Order 42 on May 31, 2021, be amended as follows: by striking out "and" at the end of clause (d), by adding "and" at the end of clause (e), and by adding the following immediately after clause (e):

(f) urge the government of Alberta to work with the government of Canada

- (i) to develop an online registry of residential school cemeteries,
- (ii) to inform affected families of the location of their child's burial, and
- (iii) to develop procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, and protection of residential school cemeteries, and the commemoration of those who are buried in these cemeteries.

The Acting Speaker: Going forward, this amendment will be referred to as amendment A1.

If the hon. minister could please continue.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're wanting to do is to work with the federal government and to be able to locate these graves to make sure we know where they're at, because it is sacred ground. Like I was explaining before when we were going to do

some expansion at the Poundmaker's, we could have built on top of a grave and not even known it. If we could find these and locate them so that we can honour them in the future and work with Service Alberta to find out all the names and let the families know of where their loved ones are, that's what the amendment is about.

Basically, we want to work with this, we want to get this motion passed. I think it's an important motion. If you had been to the vigil last night, you'd have seen the pain that people are suffering. Like I said, as a father I don't know how I could bear it, not knowing where your children are. What a terrible thing.

I put the amendment on the floor, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

We are on amendment A1. Are there any members wishing to speak?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Speaker: We are back to the main motion. Are there any members wishing to speak to the main motion? I see the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my colleagues for allowing us all the opportunity to engage in this conversation today. As I've said earlier today, it is without question that the discovery of the remains of 215 children in Kamloops is shocking. It is tragic, and, quite frankly, it's impacted all Canadians across the country, without question. Obviously, and particularly, it is incredibly painful for indigenous people across this country to once again be reminded of a tragedy that they're all too well aware of and that features prominently in many people's lives to this day.

3:20

Yesterday, as with the minister, I attended the vigil. As, you know, we listened to the elders and we allowed ourselves to consider the issues that they brought to the group who were there, you can't help as a parent, of course, but imagine your own situation and imagine the prospect of having your children taken away from you, taken to a place – perhaps you don't even know where it is – and not knowing how they're being cared for and in many cases, of course, having heard from your friends and your neighbours and your relatives already that the places those children were being taken to were not places that you could trust, imagining my own children when they were that age, five or six, being lost and alone in a place where they didn't know if they could count on anybody in that place to keep them safe, to keep them protected, or to make them feel loved, and to know that above and beyond that they were not only not feeling loved, they were being abused and told that they were not of value.

Of course, in the moment of thinking about that and imagining that horrific situation, I was struck by being both deeply saddened and also incredibly angry and, you know, feeling the desire to do something about it. Of course, I realize that part of that, I guess, comes from my own privilege because that is, I think, how many of us here would respond to that situation. It's then that you realize the depth and the breadth of the abuse that indigenous people in this country have faced generation after generation after generation as a result of intentional policy adopted by our governments and by many institutions to effectively dehumanize not just children but their parents, their grandparents, their uncles, their aunts, their friends, their neighbours. Generation from generation there was an embedded systemic effort to dehumanize people. So when those children were lost, they felt the grief but they probably didn't even

know where to put the anger because in many cases they were told they weren't entitled to it.

It speaks to the monumental task that is before us when it comes to the issue of reconciliation, when it comes to the issue of trying to right the wrongs that were perpetrated against the first citizens, the first inhabitants of our land over many, many, many, many years. There's no quick answer. There's never a quick answer. People were asking me today, you know, what's – apologies: everyone is getting very tired of apologies, and they're tired of politicians speaking. Quite frankly, I don't blame them. The fact is that the answers are probably never going to be complete and they will always be complicated and they will always take a very, very long time to address, but that doesn't mean that we should allow ourselves to forget or dismiss our obligation as legislators to address those issues no matter how long standing they are, no matter how complicated they are to wrestle with, no matter how long it will take to bring about any kind of improvement or solution.

You know, I think all of us could probably get up here and talk forever about the kinds of things that need to be done or addressed, and I'm not going to profess to be close to exhaustive on this. In fact, the reason I would do that is as a point of principle because, really, it's not me who has the answer; it's the communities who have been impacted. They are the ones who've been offering up decades or more of answers, and they ask only to be heard and respected and to have those answers acted upon.

That being said, you know, with a particular element of this tragedy that we are all confronted with today, there is work that we can do in order to truly honour the memories of these dead children. We know that in Alberta there are over 800 children that died in residential schools, but really we suspect it's far more than 800 because there is oral tradition, and oral tradition tells us that it's far, far more than that. We know that the TRC has identified roughly 25 residential schools that functioned in Alberta, but we also know that that excludes schools that didn't receive federal funding, so, in fact, it's probably a much larger group of schools than just 25. So we know that there are probably a lot of young souls in our province that haven't been named or mourned or remembered across this province.

It's for that reason that I think it's really important for us to very quickly respond to the calls that we have seen just today from the leaders of Treaty 6, calling on this government to work with them, to work with leaders of indigenous communities to quickly put together an action plan to identify potential burial sites across the province and, in consultation with the community, develop a plan for identifying and remembering and commemorating the souls of the likely more than 800 children who were systematically taken from their homes and allowed to perish when away from their families. So that's Treaty 6 calls.

The TRC itself also made a similar call a few years ago now. They made, I believe, six recommendations that would have allowed us to work more effectively and more quickly to find and mourn and ultimately honour the children who were lost through the residential school genocide. They, in particular, said – and I'll just go through them very quickly – that they called upon all chief coroners and provincial vital statistics agencies to provide to the TRC “their records on the deaths of Aboriginal children in the care of residential school authorities.”

They called upon the federal government “to allocate sufficient resources to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to allow it to develop and maintain” a residential school student death registry.

They called on the federal government “to work with churches, Aboriginal communities, and former residential school students to

establish and maintain an online registry of residential school cemeteries, including, where possible, plot maps.”

They called upon the federal government to work with churches and aboriginal community leaders to inform the families of children who died at residential schools of the children’s burial location and to then listen to the families’ wishes for appropriate commemoration and to do that.

And they called upon the federal government “to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students, and current landowners to develop and implement strategies for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries.” And then they called for support in having all the parties work together on strategies for maintaining and documenting residential school cemeteries and the records associated with them.

Now, it is notable that media is reporting today that in 2009 the federal government was asked for \$1.5 million for the TRC to work on these objectives and that was turned down then. It is certainly never too late to say yes. It is never too late to move forward on these strategies with greater levels of energy and focus and purpose. I would urge the government to move on that as quickly as they possibly can.

3:30

Of course, the amendment that we just agreed to talked about working with the federal government, but here’s the thing: you know, all good intentions aside, sometimes that becomes a barrier in and of itself. There is a lot that can be done in this province. We were a place that was critical in the country for having too many of these schools. We could as a province act on our own to address these issues. We do not have to wait for the federal government to do that. I would urge the government to just move on their own without waiting for the federal government to step in.

Now, on the larger issues that were identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I’d like to speak to two or three of those as well. I do that because it’s all connected. As I said at the outset, the task of honouring these children begins with finding their remains, naming them as well as we can, mourning them, and respecting the pain and the consequence that their families and loved ones endured. But it certainly doesn’t end there. Quite the opposite. We have to understand that, in fact, for those families, for those communities it still hasn’t ended. I can’t imagine what it would do to my family if this happened generation after generation after generation. For that reason, we have an obligation to continue the much larger set of efforts that have been laid before us through the work of the TRC. As I say, there were a number of elements of it.

When we were in government, we supported the investigation into missing and murdered indigenous women. We issued an apology to residential school survivors, and we made a commitment that the history of residential school survivors in Alberta would be taught to all Alberta children, beginning in kindergarten through to grade 12, so that that inherent element of our history was not lost and it could be maintained for the purposes of understanding, of context. Also, as we all know, one of the most important reasons of knowing history is to ensure that we don’t somehow repeat it. Quite honestly, that moves into the next issue.

Of course, you know, today the Premier talked about the elements of the residential school experience that are discussed in grade 5. I would argue that that does not meet the recommendations that were set out by the TRC, and I will not be the first person in this House to identify what has been identified most passionately by indigenous Albertans, that, in fact, it is something that should be

taught throughout the education of our children. But above and beyond that, part of the reason that we want that context is to ensure that moving forward, we make better choices. We know that right now the children of those residential school survivors, the grandchildren of those residential school survivors, the great-great-grandchildren of those residential school survivors still continue to struggle in many communities.

That’s, unfortunately, one of the big reasons why indigenous children are far overrepresented in our child protection system in a way that results in there being stories now told every day, every week throughout the year of children in care who die, children in care who almost die, who struggle greatly. That is a challenge that confronts all of us as members of this Assembly. That’s why when we were in government, we assembled an all-party committee to look at how we wrestle with these issues. We tried as much as we could to make it as nonpartisan as we could because, quite frankly, these issues, I think, to some degree go beyond partisanship. They certainly go beyond the moment. That’s for sure. They rest in things that happened decades ago, and we will be struggling with them, hopefully to a lesser and lesser degree, decades from now.

There was that all-party committee, and there were a number of recommendations that came out of that. I would suggest that we need to make better progress on there. You know, we’ve had conversations in this House, for instance, about the issue of children aging out of care. We know that, thankfully, that decision was deferred or delayed because of the pandemic. I would argue that it should be deferred and delayed indefinitely and should not have been brought back into this House as part of this set of recommendations that is focused on trying to provide the best opportunities possible for children, the majority of whom are indigenous.

We also had other proposals in there. One of them was – this goes back to the point that I was making before about the member’s amendment relating to the federal government. By all means, let’s always work with the federal government where we can, but let’s also understand that sometimes it just takes too long. One of the fundamental principles that has woven through much of the advocacy for indigenous people for many, many years is this important Jordan’s principle, to not allow the differences between different levels of governments’ funding responsibilities to result in profound inequities, which, of course, happens in the world of children’s services and children’s support and social services. We put forward a recommendation that we find a way for the federal government to step up and address the inequity that exists between children’s support services for those who are First Nations and come from or are attached to a reserve versus those who are not because that, frankly, needs to be fixed.

So we need to see more reports and updates from the government in terms of the progress that’s been made with that set of recommendations because, again, they were recommendations that were globally agreed to by members on both sides of this House just a few years ago.

Larger issues. I was looking back to when we first made the apology to residential school survivors, and indigenous leaders at the time said: “Well, this is lovely. Thank you for the apology, but there are bigger issues here. We need to be included in the economy. We need to be given the wherewithal to grow our communities, all those things.” That’s a legitimate point, and we do need to do that. How do we do that? Well, we all know that members on both sides of this House voted in favour of this government’s initiative to work with First Nations groups who wanted to invest in certain oil and gas projects. That is fine. It does not end there, though. Of course, that’s where we need to continue our work. We must as a matter of principle respect the nation-to-nation relationship. We must

understand that at all levels there is an obligation for meaningful engagement and consultation. We must continue to ensure that there are opportunities for fully shared participation in our economic successes. So those are things. We also need to engage when it comes to protecting our environment, protecting our water. We need to ensure that First Nations Albertans are not subject to additional decisions being made about them. Those things are fundamental principles.

I mean, I realize that I'm now going into a much larger area, but they are all related. As I say, the TRC has a very, very intelligent, thoughtful document that gives us a road map, and it's time for us to work on reaching the destination of that road map.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next, I believe the individual who caught my eye is the hon. Minister of Transportation and Minister of Municipal Affairs.

3:40

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to speak to the motion brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South and amended by the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations. It's an important debate that we're having, an important discussion because essentially it's about the dignity of life and the respect for life, something that I suppose, if you mentioned on the street or in a coffee shop, somebody would say: "Of course, life has dignity. Of course, we have respect for life." Well, it's been sadly pushed in our face that that's not always true. In fact, there are many times that we, with a certain amount of pride in this country in which we live as Canadians, think that, yeah, this is a place where people come and they're respected and treated well. Well, we're forced once more to recognize that that's not always the case.

Mr. Speaker, I was glad to see the hon. Leader of the Opposition talk about the committee in the last government that we had about children in care. I was one of the people that sat on that committee. I, frankly, found it gut-wrenching many times, the true stories, the true recounts that people gave of their lives as a result, amongst other things, of the residential school system, the '60s scoop. You could argue, I suppose, I think with some legitimacy, that the '60s scoop is still going on. I only say that because there are about two out of three children in care in Alberta that are indigenous. That's not two out of three children in Alberta that are indigenous; it's two out of three children in care that are indigenous. I think that that, to me, is pretty strong evidence that there are things that we need to do better.

We need to learn from mistakes in the past. We need to stop making them because there are 215 human beings found outside of the Kamloops residential school. Each one of those had a name. Each one of those had parents. Each one, I'm sure, had dreams and plans of their own even as children. They didn't even get tombstone data, which is name, where born, the year of birth, the year of death if nothing else. Not even that.

You might say: what are some reasonable questions that we might ask confronted with this tragedy? Who were they? Who are their families today, and don't they deserve to know what happened to their loved one? Which communities lost a son or a daughter, or which families lost more than one son or daughter? How or why did they die? I'm sure there could be a different answer for every single one of them. Some might have died of tuberculosis. Some may have been murdered. I mean, the fact is that we don't know. That's a shame by itself that, at least as far as I know today, apparently nobody took the trouble to write it down. How disrespectful can it be that 215 children die, and apparently nobody bothered to call their family? Left them to wonder where their loved ones are, what became of them. How did they die, or did they run away and just

never get found? These 215 clearly died, but the fact is that their families didn't know for sure, weren't told, weren't respected, weren't treated with dignity.

There are a lot of lessons to be learned. I suppose, if we think about it, we can figure some of them out ourselves, but I think one of the things that we need to do is talk to the elders from the communities that these kids came from. We need to talk to their relatives that are still surviving. We need to understand those families whose grandfather or grandmother or aunt or uncle or son or daughter disappeared, what negative effect that's had on their family ever since. We can only speculate on what great things those kids might have done had they survived, had they gone on to join society and do the things that they dreamt of as kids. We've been confronted with the reality, and it's not a pretty reality. It's a black mark on our country, on our province, on us as citizens.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there has been tremendous intergenerational damage done as a result of the residential schools, not only done to those who died but done to those who lived. We know that, yet it seems we still have more to learn. You know, one of the greatest signs of respect that we show at Remembrance Day is saying that we will remember them. Well, thus far these kids haven't been remembered. It's well past time that they were.

I support this motion today. I'm grateful for it. I support the idea of making the effort to find out how many more burial sites there are from residential schools, schools across Canada. I'm a little afraid to learn what we'll find out when we look, but we owe it to those human beings to do so.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm grateful that we're having the discussion today. It's a stark reminder that every human being, every life has dignity. Every human being deserves respect. I guess I am of the strong opinion that we need to learn whatever lessons we can. We need to put whatever things we can in place to ensure that atrocities such as this don't happen anymore in the future. I believe that if ever there was a nonpartisan issue, this is it.

I will sit down and hope that all members from all sides of the House – and I believe that they will – will remain committed to learning from this, finding a way to memorialize and remember those who were buried, and to do better in the future. That's the least that we should do.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I very much appreciate the opportunity to join with all sides of the House today to talk about such an incredibly important topic in the history of Canada, in the history of Alberta and speak to the horrors that were the residential schools and the devastating effect that the residential schools have had on not only the families that were directly affected but, of course, the whole indigenous community and therefore all of Canada. The scar that is left on so many hearts and the damage that has been done to so many lives as a result of this is just unspeakable and horrendous. I appreciate that we're taking time in this House unanimously today to address these concerns as they should very appropriately be addressed.

I'd like to begin by again thanking the Minister of Indigenous Relations for his words earlier about the discovery of these 215 children in Kamloops and, of course, for the just recent amendment to the Standing Order 42 to include really specifically the words from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations 71 to 76, including much of that in this particular Standing Order 42 conversation. Thank you very much for allowing us to work cooperatively to do something which I think is, ultimately, important not only for this House but for the province of Alberta and, I

suspect, all of Canada, who are in a state of appropriate shock and grieving today for the loss of so many young lives and knowing that that is, seriously, only a small portion of the children who are likely to have in fact died in residential schools.

3:50

I do want to take a moment to speak a little bit about the history of the residential schools because it's very important to me, I guess, that we not see this as somehow a one-off incident that can be regretted and moved on from. The whole history of our treatment of indigenous people in this province is a history of systemic racism that goes throughout our society, throughout our governments, whether they be provincial or federal, and makes every single citizen in this province and in this country complicit in what I firmly believe to be a genocide.

I just want to speak a little bit about why I say that. You know, I have taken the time to sort of make sure that I'm looking at the documentation around genocide and so on, and I do want to take a moment to read into the record some of the Rome Statute, which was the enabling document for the International Criminal Court in terms of its definition of genocide. Article 6 reads:

For the purpose of this Statute, "genocide" means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

I want to put that out there because I think it would not take us very long to argue that each of those conditions of the definition of genocide, even when that statute actually only requires any of them to exist – but I would say that we could quite easily argue in the province of Alberta that all of those conditions, in fact, happened to the indigenous people in this province. I think it's important, in my conversations with members of the indigenous community, whether it be First Nations or Métis or Inuit members of this country, that we recognize that this was not an inconvenience, this was not an incidental fact of their history; it was indeed a genocide and, I'm afraid, I have to say, a genocide with intention.

You know, being an old lecturer, I certainly could go on for a long time to demonstrate that, but let me just take one moment to give you an example. Now, one of the individuals in Canadian history who was largely responsible for the creation and administration of the Indian Act and, obviously, had significant responsibility for the residential schools was an individual by the name of Duncan Campbell Scott. Duncan Campbell Scott is often associated with the phrase "kill the Indian, save the man," with the idea he had that the total elimination of First Nations culture and histories and traditions was somehow going to be beneficial for the individuals involved.

In fact, he is quoted as saying, with regard to the issue of residential schools, "Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill." I think, quite clearly, he laid it out that the intention here was cultural genocide, that he certainly wanted to kill the Indian, and if that meant destroying a culture, a tradition, a people, and even lives, he was prepared to do that.

I don't want to reargue history, but I think it's important that we stand here and acknowledge that this is the history of Canada, and

since Canada has been a nation, this has been part of our work. In fact, by the turn of the 20th century, the 1900s, there were somewhere in the neighbourhood of 18 industrial schools. At first these schools were called industrial schools because they were originally designed to teach people skills for the workforce, but eventually they decided that it had to be more than workforce training, so they created residential schools. By the turn of the century there were 18 industrial schools and 36 residential schools. That number continued to rise over the next 30 or 40 years, and eventually we got to a place where, over that 150-year span of the existence of residential schools, we saw close to 150 different schools that had existed at one time or another and over 150,000 pupils had attended the schools.

Now, sometimes people argue: well, it was just an attempt by settlers to provide education to First Nations people so that they could be successful in the society as it was developing; you know, that's why they originally set them up as industrial schools rather than residential schools, with that explicit purpose. But I want to be very clear that very much right from the beginning of the existence of these schools Canadian society – that is, the institutions of Canada, including the government of Canada – learned that these schools were dramatically destructive to the people who attended them. In fact, there was so much evidence that children were dying in droves in going to these schools. In fact, some of the early reports suggest that across all the schools there was a death rate of approximately 25 per cent and in some schools going up to 50 per cent. Can you imagine any school in your community if 25 per cent of the children died for any reason whatsoever or if it had been 50 per cent of the children who died?

Canada, the Canadian government, and subsequently the Alberta government knew of these because it was reported. It was reported and read into the *Hansard* in the federal House of Commons, the death of so many children. They were naming them and reading them in in order to try to convince the government to do something about this.

A report was commissioned by a Dr. Bryce, who went and did a study of the residential schools, and in 1922 he put together and supplied to the federal government a report which was titled *The Story of a National Crime*. This is 1922. This is almost a hundred years ago. Next year it's a hundred years from that report. In that report he articulated statistically exactly what we all knew: these residential schools were a death sentence for many children, and the government was aware of it, and the government continued it.

I bring all this up not to get us lost in statistics when really the tragedy is the grief and loss and the mourning that is experienced by the indigenous community but to remind people in this House that this was not accidental, that this was not a single incident in history that we've moved beyond. This is indeed the legacy that we are all a part of, and if we do not do something about it, we are complicit in the ongoing trauma that is experienced within the community.

We also have a more recent report right here in Alberta. Reverend Kevin Annett, from the St. Paul area, took some time and did an exploration of the residential school system in the province of Alberta and came up with a report published in 2001 called *Hidden From History: The Canadian Holocaust*.

4:00

I bring all that together to remind this House that this truly is a holocaust. This is a genocide, and we need to act like it is. We need to absolutely work together to acknowledge our history no matter how grotesque it is and to bring the truth to the table. We cannot have reconciliation until we have truth, and we just got slapped in the face with one of the most horrendous aspects of that truth in this

last week, learning about the 215 child bodies which were buried in a mass grave, unidentified to either their families or to the state, in the city of Kamloops.

We know that the reality is that that is true across Canada, and Alberta is going to be one of the places that has the most number of deaths because we know this province has had a disproportionate number of residential schools. We know that of the reported deaths, we have approximately 25 per cent, 800 of them, here in the province of Alberta. Senator Murray Sinclair has suggested that the reported deaths probably dramatically underreport the actual number of deaths, maybe by two- or three- or fourfold.

I think it's very important that we take responsibility for this, and I really appreciate the government and the minister working with us to move this forward and responding to our calls to fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 71 to 76. I certainly offer my support and the support of all of our side of the House to the minister and the government. If there's anything we can do – stand on any committee, provide any services – we certainly will be there for you, and that's my commitment to you, because it is fundamentally important that we do something about this.

The truth part is going to have to come first, and I think that's the biggest piece that we need to get our heads around a little bit here. The reality is that, as some of the speakers have already identified, we really don't know how many children have died. We don't know who they are, and we don't know whose family they belong to, but there are some people out there who do. There are elders and people who are knowledge keepers who know something about all of this.

I think that there are a number of things that we're going to have to do. We are going to have to engage in a process of bringing in the right people to begin to explore all of the residential sites and to look for those graves, to look for the dead bodies that are here in Alberta, just like they were in Kamloops. We're going to have to then identify the DNA of each of those children. As an individual each child needs to be identified because they need to be honoured, and their families need to be told who they were so that they can acknowledge their personal losses. When we identify their DNA, we then need to match that DNA with families and be able to say to the families: this was your brother; this was your uncle; this could have been your grandfather or played another role in your family had they not died at such a young age; this is your relative.

They can take that knowledge and acknowledge the horror that's happened and begin the healing process of recovery of the remains, the repatriation of those remains back to their home communities – or whatever it is the elders decide is the right thing to do; I wouldn't, you know, want to dictate to them – should they want to do that. All of this needs to be done only with the permission, the direction, the guidance of indigenous leaders, elders, and communities. We must acknowledge that there will be a need to observe indigenous protocol in all of these steps moving forward so that we can actually do the hard work of the truth part of truth and reconciliation.

You know, many times in this House I stand up and ask for the government to take action on various things, whatever it be: water to reserves or the curriculum or health programs or educating the public service, many, many, many different things. But I think that we cannot just leap into those forms of action until we have absolutely committed ourselves to seeking out and facing the truth without shading our eyes, without excusing ourselves, and without denying the reality of a genocide, putting a label on it as to what it is. You have to claim what happened to you.

You know, I've had some experience with this type of intense, deep work. Many of you know I spent a good dozen years in my life working as a child sexual abuse therapist and worked with people who had to go through a similar process. In fact, many

indigenous people were part of the work that I was engaged in. We knew in that process that children who had been sexually abused needed to be able to claim: that is what happened to me. They had to be able to put a label on it, that they were sexually abused, that what happened to them was horrible and traumatic and terrible.

Once that was acknowledged by them and their perpetrators, then there was a chance that they would be able to go on and engage in recovery and to arrive at a much better place, and I think that's absolutely true here in this case. When I talk about the government taking the step to define this as a genocide, that's all I'm asking, to give it the label that actually identifies what it is so that we can boldly and truthfully commit ourselves to the truth part of truth and reconciliation.

I mean, I certainly know this government has a number of thoughts and considerations about how to do that, just as we did when we were in government. I know that when they did bring into the House, for example, the AIOC in order to try to increase and lift up the communities through economic development, they received unanimous support in this House for that because we agreed with them. That is an important part, but it isn't the only part. My plea today is that we as a community – and I'm not just throwing this at the government; I really want all of us to be part of this. This side of the House, the government side of the House, the community out there need to really grasp on to what has happened in our society, and we need to commit ourselves to not putting up with the doubters and the deniers and to say that we as a society have been complicit in a genocide and that we are here to take responsibility for that. In taking responsibility, of course, it will lead to action, but you cannot lead to action that is meaningful until you have said what it is that you need to say, and that is: Canada committed a genocide against the people.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche has risen.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and fifteen kids left in an unmarked grave. Earlier this week we learned that there were 215 kids left in an unmarked grave at the Kamloops residential school. I have been struggling to find words since the discovery. As an expectant mother I can't even imagine what these parents endured. My heart goes out to the families of these precious little children, their communities, and to everyone impacted. There truly are no words that adequately explain the devastation and heartbreak of residential schools.

Residential schools are a sad and tragic chapter in Canada's history that continue to impact the lives of so many, but this isn't simply a history lesson. The last residential school closed in 1996, 25 years ago. Let that sink in.

My constituency manager, Deborah Moses, is a very special woman. She was raised by two survivors of the residential school system, and her parents took care to ensure that she and all of her siblings would never see the inside of a residential school. They lived off-reserve and without status to keep their children with them at home. With the permission of Deborah I am sharing part of her dad's story.

4:10

Her father, Joseph Esau, was taken at the age of three from his family from Quebec and brought to the St. John's Indian Residential School in Chapleau, Ontario. He was three. Upon his arrival at the residential school his last name was changed to Moses. Like so many that graced the halls of the residential schools, he was forever changed. He completely lost connection with his family, his

culture, and his language. While he was lucky enough to eventually leave the school, he never went home. He didn't even know he had a home to go to or family that he could call his own. In fact, when he turned 65, he found out that the residential school had changed his last name all those years prior. Unbeknownst to him, his mother had been searching for him since the day he left home, and unfortunately she was only able to find her son Joseph after he had passed away in 1987 at age 69.

Joseph Moses didn't talk about his experience in residential schools. He simply did what he could to prevent his children and grandchildren from sharing his experience. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that he succeeded, and none of his children nor grandchildren had to endure the legacy of the residential schools first-hand.

I can't even begin to imagine the pain. I share this story to show one of so many stories that come from the horrors of the residential schools. There are over 150,000 stories, one for each of the students who crossed through the doors. In order to work towards reconciliation, we must all come together and find a way to grieve, to heal, to educate ourselves, and to educate future generations on these horrors. I will use my voice to call for federal action to research all of these undocumented deaths and burials in the residential school sites all across this country.

I want to thank Minister Wilson for bringing forward his amendment so that we can do our part here in Alberta to help, because every child matters. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Sweet: Edmonton-Manning.

The Acting Speaker: Edmonton-Manning. My apologies on that.

Ms Sweet: It's okay, Mr. Speaker. It's Monday.

Thank you for allowing me to rise, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to probably be short, I think. Friday we learned about the mass grave of the 215 children that died. I'll give you a little bit of a personal story before I get into this. I worked at Metis Child when I first graduated from social work. When I started working at Metis Child, my executive director always teased me. They were, like: "Well, you have indigenous in you. You're First Nations. You're Métis. You're something. We know that you are." I was: "Well, not that I know of. I mean, nobody has ever told me in my family that we have any type of indigenous background or about being Métis or anything like that." They were: "No, Heather. You need to look. You need to research. You need to learn, because you are. Like, we just know you are."

So, you know, I called my dad and was like: "Okay. Dad, seriously, they're teasing me at work all the time about, 'You're First Nations; you're something.'" He's like, "Oh, yeah, well, just look in the front of our Bible." I was like, "What are you talking about?" He's like, "Well, look in the front of the Bible. We have Mohawk in our ancestry. Your great-grandfather was Mohawk, and we just don't talk about it." I was like, "Well, why don't we talk about it?" He's like, "I don't know. It's just something that we just don't do. But, yeah, there are pictures, and if you go back, you'll see that we have a really strong First Nations background and part Métis. This is why when you started working at Metis Child, it made sense to all of us." Nobody ever questioned it. Nobody ever bothered to tell me that it made sense.

Of course, I went back to my director, and I was like, "I guess you're right." Of course, they teased me even more because that's what happens. My director was like, "Well, I knew you had to be Mohawk because I'm part Mohawk, and I always thought that you

were, you know, a kindred spirit of mine." It always kind of struck me as odd that our family would never have talked about this and that it wouldn't be something that I'd learn about until I was in my mid-20s, that this is our family background.

Of course, I had a great career as a social worker before I was elected, and I got to work at Metis Child for many years. Then I went and worked in indigenous communities with our indigenous offices, working with Bigstone and Siksika and a couple of other First Nations communities. I've always been obviously drawn to working with First Nations communities, and my heart has always felt like I've been at home whenever I've been in those communities but, at the same time, always feeling completely out of place. I had to learn the teachings of the elders and be able to participate in different, you know, rituals. I got to go to a sweat and things like that, things like – I've never really felt like it was my home because I didn't know any better. I didn't know that because our family never talked about it, of course, like many people in the indigenous community. Many families don't talk about it, and the reason that we don't talk about it and the reason that we, until someone brings it up in the family, I guess, have those conversations is for this very reason.

So I was thinking about Sunday last night and how people came to the Legislature and the vigil was there. I wasn't there. To be honest, because on Friday – I just couldn't go yesterday. Obviously, there are things in our family where we are still learning about our community. But I worked in children's services for a long time, and I worked with a young mother whose child was apprehended. I was the support person to the mother, not to the child, but unfortunately within 24 hours of that child being apprehended, that child died from SIDS, and I had to grieve with that mother through that process and the guilt that she carried, because she obviously blamed herself.

4:20

I was her worker for five years. Her baby died within the first eight months of me being her worker. She then became pregnant a couple of years later, and the worry that she carried through that pregnancy and the fear that she carried through that pregnancy because she was so scared that they were going to take her baby, that the minute she had that baby that that baby would be gone: there was no reason for that. She was a healthy, independent – and she continues to be so – very successful woman and an amazing mother. But she was scared because her family, her parents had gone through the system. She had experienced her life going through the system. Her first experience as a parent was, unfortunately, the death of a child. Then her next fear was that it was going to happen again.

We talk about these babies, these young children, and this wasn't very long ago. We look at the 215 babies that died, and then I look at their families and the families that exist within Alberta and the fact that many, many families continue to face that fear and that worry and that trauma of residential schools because many of them have grandparents or parents that were impacted by residential schools.

You know, on Friday, when this happened, I happened to be with a whole bunch of health care professionals at that time. It was probably a really good place for me to be, actually. I was talking to a paramedic. The paramedic was telling me about an experience that he had – and I've now shared this story, I think, four times in the last three days – where he had to respond to a medical emergency. A woman was having some heart complications. It was an indigenous family. He responded, and he had to take this woman into the hospital because she was having a heart attack, and there were children in the house. This was their kokum, or grandmother. The children started to cry and said, "Please don't take my kokum

away. Please don't take my kokum away," because they truly believed that she wasn't going to come back because that was their experience. They had been told that this is what happens.

So this paramedic, this person who is trying to help, was trying to explain to this child: "Don't worry. Grandma is coming back. Kokum is coming back." There was so much fear and trauma in that household because of the experience that this family had been through that he was, like, devastated. I mean, he obviously had to take kokum. He had to take grandma with him. But that family has carried on with him through his career because these are the experiences that people – the indigenous community, the First Nations community, Métis, Inuit – have experienced.

You know, I worked in children's services because I believed that children should be with their parents, and when I worked in my profession, I mean, I worked with high-risk youth in the inner city. Many of those youth were dealing with addictions, whether it be personal addictions or family addictions or whatever it may be, because their parents and their grandparents had been raised to believe that they were bad parents, that they were bad people, that their culture didn't matter, that who they were didn't matter. We know that when we hear that who you are doesn't matter, you find a way to fix that, and sometimes that is done by being involved in drugs or alcohol or different things. Then there's so much shame and so much blame, and it just keeps piling on over and over and over again. The racism and the stigma that gets attached to that continues to cause damage.

You know, I think we need to be very careful as we're continuing to have this conversation today and as we continue to have this conversation going forward. Anybody who's ever been in a traumatic situation, whether it be residential schools or, to make it very simple, a car accident – if you are in another car accident or someone brings up a reference to a car accident or is talking about those things, you are traumatizing people over and over and over again. When we talk about residential schools, we are bringing up a traumatic event for many of these families over and over and over again, and we're not acknowledging the pain and the impact that that is having on the people that have been impacted by it. I want to acknowledge and say thank you to those who went to the vigil on Sunday, who were strong enough to stand there and to have that moment and to acknowledge the pain that families have gone through. I'll be honest; I wasn't strong enough on Sunday to do that. I didn't have the ability to go.

For those elders and families that went to the truth and reconciliation who were honest and open about their experiences, who talked about the trauma and the impacts on communities and what that means, it is triggering. It is traumatic. It is very painful for many people. I think we have to acknowledge that as we move forward, working within Children's Services and creating policies in this place, when we talk about corrections and the justice system and how we move forward in this place, there is a long history that is attached to many of these institutions and many of these policies and pieces of legislation that we talk about. There is a way forward and there is a way to support communities, but first we have to acknowledge what has come before us. We have to be more inclusive in the conversations.

Now, something that I also want to make sure that we acknowledge is that there is a residential school crisis line that people can call for those who have been impacted or those who may be children or grandchildren. If you don't want to call that number, there are other numbers that you can call around 211 or talking to an elder or doing some traditional healing and using some traditional medicine.

These 215 children are a reminder to all of us that there are still children within our system who are separated from their parents.

There are children who have passed away within our system, within Children's Services, that were not with their families. We all at some point over the last year with COVID have acknowledged the grief of not being with your family because of isolation or having to have to look at all of those things. Take those moments of thinking about, "I wish I could have seen my parents and gone for a coffee," or "I wish I could have seen my grandbabies." With COVID-19 it will come to an end, but these families never got that closure. There are many families that continue to be separated from each other, who don't know where their siblings are or what happened to their grandparents or what happened to their children.

I just want to honour those stories, and I want to honour those experiences. I guess I'm asking everybody in this Chamber to acknowledge that we don't know where everybody comes from. We don't know our stories. We don't know people's experiences. Just like me, I learned later in life about who I truly am, and I'm still learning because, of course, again, it's not something my family spoke about. I would just ask that we take that moment and reflect and that when we talk about legislation in this place that impacts our children, we acknowledge that there are histories that brought us here today that will impact the future of all of our children as we move forward.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Oki, Mr. Speaker. I am the Member for Lethbridge-West, which is Blackfoot territory, the territory of the Kainai, Piikani, Siksika people, and the Blackfeet of Montana. So, too, we have a very large Métis organization and population in southern Alberta. I am here in part to represent their views. I shall begin my words this afternoon, in speaking to the discovery of 215 indigenous children at the Kamloops residential school, with words from indigenous leaders from my own community, and then I will go on to talk about what can be done substantively by the provincial government, without the federal government, so that we can move forward to actually have substantive action.

Alberta, in fact, has a very proud history of simply moving along with some pieces where the federal government just simply does not uphold their responsibilities. I'm thinking here of matters big and small, the Métis settlements, for example, in a large matter. The flood relief for Siksika First Nation after the 2013 flood is a small matter, but we did not wait for the federal government; we simply saw the problem and fixed it. This issue, too, can be taken up by this provincial Legislature in a real way that goes beyond words.

But let us start first with the words of my friend, someone I've learned a great deal from, Diandra Bruised Head, who is a councillor with Blood Tribe. She was elected just a few months ago, and these are her words, Mr. Speaker, that I am reading directly.

We are tired. We are tired of being sad and being angry, yet the fires in our hearts still blaze in the face of oppression. There are tools in our society that can be used, no, led by the philosophy of indigenous people, of Blackfoot people, of Niitsitapi. Instead of continued lip service, we want real, effective changes in the form of accessibility to these tools such as harm reduction strategy, a strong mental health system, and a better justice system. The judgment of God is upon us, writes Councillor Bruised Head.

When will our leaders step outside of their comfort of denial and relinquish their blissful ignorance and recognize that the foundations of this country, this province were built on the bloodshed of our most innocent and vulnerable children? Religion, public policy, stereotyped mindsets: these were all equally to

blame, and no matter how much it is called out and pointed at to change, none of it will bring our children back.

Yet we cannot do this alone. Hate is too great a burden to bear. There is no you versus me. There is no white versus black versus brown, because that's exactly what led to residential schools. The guilt you feel is yours, and when you are done with your guilt, step aside and let us work to systems change. What was done to settle this land was not right, yet consultation is still just a word in the dictionary. Where is the intent of the treaties during natural resource development?

Similarly, our children, our most valued beings, are still being stolen and given to nonnative families in the form of the foster system, where they are lost from their roots, their ways, their ancestors. We need familial reform where all children are taught true, genuine respect for each other, respect for the land, for the water, for the wildlife. These, writes Councillor Bruised Head, are the true tenets that should have been in the foundations of this province and the country. Familial harm reduction in the form of communicative, collaborative systems works to heal all members of a family, because trauma is a radiating ripple that impacts all in a community.

We ask for Alberta to hold your municipalities, your politicians, your leaders to account, to uphold the 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These include healing spaces, treaties, the Constitution, human rights. To address the ongoing legacy of colonialism and unequal outcomes, survivors requested, foremost, healing for themselves, their communities, their nations, yet resources are limited to do that healing. We are asking for land and healing space so that we can heal with the land. Please, we call on you to ensure that this dark history is addressed. We call for the excavations of all those old residential schools in this province. We call for a day of mourning; 215 days would still be not enough to remember what was lost.

Those were the words of councillor Diandra Bruised Head from the Blood Tribe council.

Similarly, too, I have words here, a message, from the president of the Lethbridge Métis. Dr. Adam Browning says: the Métis are referred to as [Remarks in Cree], the people who own themselves. Throughout history the struggle to own ourselves has been challenged, particularly through the government- and church-run residential schools. Métis children were expropriated from their families in the attempt to assimilate them into what was thought to be the dominant culture. Throughout Canada's and Alberta's history the TRC commission found that Métis attended almost every residential school at some point. Our Métis community shares in the collective trauma of all indigenous peoples who have suffered forced assimilation, and this is a legacy that we are continually reminded of.

For those watching at home, at 6 o'clock tonight the Métis Association of Lethbridge is holding a vigil, and that will be in front of St. Patrick's Church on 4th Avenue and 10th Street in downtown Lethbridge.

Mr. Speaker, it is not a surprise that these 215 children were found at Kamloops. Not at all. Not at all. The death and mortality rate of children at residential schools is well documented in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. In fact, if one googles simply the national commission, nctr.ca/records, one finds a 44-page report – it's right there; it's the first link, pretty well – that details a number of problems of methodology, problems of finding, problems of understanding mortality patterns, understanding burial policies, understanding the context of competition and costs between churches, understanding the challenges of collection of archival data. There's a 44-page academic paper, and then there are 83 pages of maps as to where

these burial sites may be and the kind of work that has been done already.

Now, that particular report indicates that, by their research, 3,213 deaths of children happened at some 150 locations over 140 years. That is, of course, a minimum estimate as what's been documented so far by the considerable research that has been done. It's important to remember here that one of the things that that report puts a really fine point on is that it is local knowledge and local archival records that have in fact led to the best instances of where these bodies have been found and identified. That is to say that many of these graves themselves have also been orphaned through schools changing, through lack of documentation, and so on. But there are local circumstances where we know. There are local stories. There are local archives.

A lot of this, Mr. Speaker, falls under provincial jurisdiction; that is to say, zoning: how we regulate cemeteries, how we do land-use planning, how we do mapping and GIS. In this House we have mapped flood zones. We can map topographical features. We can map this, too. It simply takes resources to do so. That is an item of action that this province could promptly undertake in partnership with integrated resource management departments, municipalities, and local indigenous elders and leaders first and foremost. Of course, nothing should be done without local knowledge and without local input – custom, culture, language – guiding the process. Having said that, those are things that we do not need to wait for the federal government to do for us. We can do them ourselves, and we can in fact put those items of business into motion from this Chamber today.

4:40

Now, of course, a lot of this work has already begun. There were 94 calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and in fact, though resources for a number of these mapping projects were denied in 2009 to the commission – there was a request for \$1.5 million under the Harper government at that time – there was \$10 million provided for such efforts in 2016, \$33 million in 2019 for a national registry, and \$13 million to commemoration initiatives since then. We do know that some of these initiatives do require co-operative fed-prov or fed-prov-municipal arrangements. We should, too, be leaders in this as Albertans. We can, and we should.

We should, Mr. Speaker, because the Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that residential schools were systematic. They were not just an initiative of the church. The church was in fact acting as an agent of the state in all of this, both Anglican and Catholic, some Methodist as well. We know that the state knew just how dangerous they were. One of the ways we know that is because the state wrote it down. For example, in a letter in 1918 Duncan Campbell Scott wrote to the B.C. Indian agent:

It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose . . . natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in the residential schools, and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this alone does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is geared towards a final solution of our Indian problem.

On the heels of those 94 recommendations it was left to provincial governments, the federal government, of course. Municipal governments and others took up their share of the work and their share of the world's struggles and the world's effort, as J.S. Woodsworth once wrote, who was the first leader of the CCF, and nowhere was that more true than in the city of Lethbridge. It was one of the first cities, to my knowledge – I think it was in Alberta, and I would stand to be happily corrected if it wasn't one of the first in Canada – to adopt the TRC recommendations and

focus municipal efforts on things they could change and things they could work on. So by 2016 there was a provincially supported community strategic plan to take focused action on social justice, health, education, training and employment, and community supports, areas where the municipality could focus their efforts.

They have indeed done a number of efforts, and we have seen an incredible amount of change. We've seen an incredible amount of programming, for example, through the Galt Museum, where one can now essentially learn Blackfoot. I have flash cards in my living room now and a workbook. All of these are tangible ways that we can understand that indigenous culture is not something from a bygone era; it is now. This is where we live, and these are languages that animate the music and the culture and the spiritual life of the land that we stand on.

Now, truth and reconciliation work also took the form, at the University of Lethbridge, where a number of – in the bygone times initiatives were undertaken such as language workshops. Martha Many Grey Horses led those. Rediscovering things like hand games that were known continent-wide by the Blackfoot people: Mary Ellen Little Mustache led those. A rediscovery of powwow songs and honour songs: John and Keith Chief Moon. There were sessions on Blackfoot traditional child-rearing practice with Georgette Fox and Sophie Tail Feathers, members of the buffalo women's society, in which participants understood then the interruption of the practice of mothering and parenting that the Indian residential school systematic stealing of children from their parents brought to the community that surrounds us and everyone that we live with today. There were also commemorations of Louis Riel. There were undertakings of various aspects of Métis culture as well.

Mr. Speaker, every level of government, every nonprofit, every organization, indeed every church – I know the Anglican Church of Canada has done much of this as well – has a responsibility. Of course, the Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic churches have other responsibilities that they have undertaken. That is good, and they need to continue them. Having said that, we all have a role to play in those 94 recommendations. None of us should be waiting for anyone to force us to do it. We should simply be undertaking the work in partnership with indigenous people.

Now, I began my words this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, with bringing you messages directly from indigenous leaders in my community. I want to conclude my thoughts by saying that even though this has affected so many of us so profoundly – I have seen Canadians shaken in ways that I don't know that they have been shaken so directly before. Like I said, much of this has been known, but this discovery of 215 indigenous children underlines to us the importance of that collaborative work, of that excavation work, of that mapping and archival work that is well within the purview of this House.

That connection as community members, as parents, as human beings, understanding that every single person matters: that is what will lead to that true reconciliation, that true moving forward and understanding that we need to take steps to get there. It's not just going to happen after we, you know, have a look at the thousands of pages in the TRC report and file them dutifully away and maybe do a land acknowledgement. Not good enough. There are so many more actions with respect to law reform, responding to the missing and murdered women and girls and two-spirited inquiry that has still sat fallow, where this House, I believe, is owed an update, is owed an action plan on how those recommendations are going to be met such that we can again begin to address violence and trauma that has infused indigenous life for too long and that settler Canadians have run away from for too long. It's been two years, so it's time for us to have a substantive response to that report, for example.

I also want to conclude, Mr. Speaker, with the following. We have a national residential school crisis line. It is a 24-hour crisis line. Whenever we speak of these matters, yes, they do move us, but they are retraumatizing for so many families. We need to recognize that, that this is not just about us standing up and, you know, as elected officials talking about how bad it all makes us feel. However bad we feel, the fact of the matter is that these conversations are often retraumatizing in ways that we do not understand or fully appreciate. So I want to make sure that I read that number into the record, which is 1.866.925.4419.

I end my comments with the practical, Mr. Speaker. Just as I have outlined some practical steps that a provincial government might take well within its purview and jurisdiction to actually address this national tragedy and national outrage, we must see action, and if we do not, that too will speak volumes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is both an honour and discouraging to rise on this day and speak on this topic as we have uncovered recently this tragic and unfortunate burial site in B.C. of 215 students who perished away from home. As a parent, certainly, reflecting on this event, I have a lot of feelings, all of them just rooted in sadness as to what's happened and the feelings that would be going through the families who have lost children and may not even know where they are.

As the Member for Cardston-Siksika I represent both the Kainai and Siksika, the two largest land-mass reserves in the country. They're both part of the Blackfoot Confederacy. The Blackfoot, like other tribes across the province, across the country, are a very proud people with a rich history and one that I have been honoured to learn about and continue to learn about. The unfortunate events of this pandemic have made it very difficult for me to be with members of the tribe in person, but prior to the pandemic it was always a very welcome invitation to visit with chief and council and to take part in powwows and see the rich and beautiful, colourful history and traditions and culture on display.

Sadly, you know, amongst this rich history that is situated basically across the highway from Cardston, where I live, was also one of the oldest residential schools in the country, which was Red Crow College. That college burned down in 2015. I agree with the Member for Lethbridge-West about not needing to wait to take action, and I believe that we have done that as the government has invested specifically in the rebuilding of the new Red Crow College, an accredited college in southern Alberta, that I was honoured to be there at the groundbreaking ceremony of last year.

I have the honour of building relationships with both Chief Fox and Chief Crowfoot in my constituency, and as I learn from those individuals, who are great leaders in their areas and respected individuals in their communities, I'm constantly reminded of how important it is to learn about the history of indigenous culture in our province. As I've learned about this mass grave uncovered in B.C. of 215 students – and I hope my words here are not misconstrued. It is absolutely tragic that this happened, but now that they have been found, we can now mourn again and we can again remember that there are dark portions of our country's history, that we certainly need to make things right.

That's why I support this motion. I support this emergency debate, particularly portions of this amendment that was moved "to inform affected families of the location of their child's burial." Again, as a parent to lose a child would be something that I couldn't

even fathom, and it breaks my heart to even think about it. Like any other parent in this room, I suspect you've thought about it, what it would be like to lose a child if you haven't lost one already. I don't know how I'd manage. I don't know how I'd cope. But to lose a child and not know where they are and just never see them again, to not know who they've become, to not know what they've done with their lives, where they're living, maybe potential grandchildren you might have – it's the unknown, Mr. Speaker, that is so discouraging and so difficult.

I see here “to inform . . . families of the location of their child's burial” – this is paramount – and “to develop an online registry of residential school cemeteries.” Part of mourning is being able to go and visit or find pieces or whatever is left of those you've lost. I think this is an important, crucial part of this motion because it allows families to continue to mourn but also to continue to heal. As a country and as a province I think it's incumbent upon us to take measures so that we can heal, so that those who have been affected can heal.

That is so important to me, so I am grateful for the measures taken today to have this difficult conversation, but that's what this Chamber is for, Mr. Speaker. It's for difficult conversations. I am certain that today we can all agree that this is an essential, important conversation to have and that we must continue to remember. As the hon. Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs has said, we cannot forget because to forget would be to do a disservice to those who were lost in this process and would be missing an opportunity to make things right.

I'm also happy that our government is taking steps towards ensuring the survival of indigenous culture. One of the many initiatives put forward by Chief Roy Fox of the Kainai is the Blackfoot language survival project, which I think is an important measure to ensure that the language, which is a central pillar of any culture, is preserved.

I recall now a moment when the hon. Minister of Education came down to Cardston. She visited the high school, and in particular she visited one of the classrooms that was teaching Blackfoot. Students were formulating words together. It was a fascinating process. As someone who speaks a second language that is very different than my first language – I speak Russian – learning a new alphabet, learning a new syntax, et cetera, is very difficult, Mr. Speaker, and one that requires you to be immersed in a culture to even begin to feel comfortable speaking that second language. So watching these students learn this language was just quite fascinating. As we move ourselves out of this pandemic, I'm excited to go back and be in person visiting with members of the Blood Tribe, Siksika to learn more about the culture, visit the powwows, and sit down and learn from them.

Mr. Speaker, I think I want to wrap up my remarks because I don't want to take up too much time. I'd love for other members of this Assembly to have the opportunity to speak on this. I just want to conclude by simply saying that I am honoured to represent Cardston-Siksika, a large portion of which has a rich tradition in Blackfoot indigenous culture and one I continue to learn about and am excited to learn about and work with those in the Siksika and the Blood Tribe. I want to thank the leaders in those tribes for all the work they do to preserve and continue to teach their culture and their traditions to their children and their grandchildren. It is so paramount, and for it we are all enriched as Canadians and Albertans and we're all better off.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my chair.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today in this House and to speak to this debate today, the motion brought forward by my colleague. As well, I appreciate the amendment brought forward by the government side and that there is a consensus here in this House today about the importance of this debate and this discussion. I don't think any person in this House has been untouched by the news this past week about the discovery of the unmarked graves of 215 indigenous children in Kamloops. We've all probably been touched in very different ways.

You know, sometimes I'm a little bit shocked when I see on social media how many people seem to be surprised by this news because I think that those of us in this Assembly and many of us should know by now, of course, about the kinds of atrocities that came from residential schools and the genocide that has been perpetrated on indigenous peoples in Canada and that we take a collective responsibility for that. I appreciate that these are strong words and these are horrific occurrences that we all struggle to make sense of. However, it is not our job to sit here and to wrestle with our own grief and wrestle with our own responsibility or nonresponsibility or to take this as some kind of issue that we have to become defensive about because the facts are the facts, Mr. Speaker. It is our job to listen, learn, and take real, strong action. That is what our job is.

I want to mention last night, Mr. Speaker. I attended the vigil here held at the Legislature, and I brought my two children, aged six and eight. We had a conversation before we went about why we were attending, what it was going to be about.

5:00

I want to highlight a few things. One is that this is not the first time I've had conversations with my children about residential schools. It's not the first time that I've spoken with my children about how indigenous peoples in this country were the First Peoples and what was done to them. These are conversations that we have had quite regularly in my household, and largely, too, I'm happy to know that, in part, those conversations build upon what they are learning in school. In kindergarten and grade 2 my children have already learned more about residential schools and what are the sad – honestly, “embarrassing” isn't the right word, because it is our history – atrocities that we all take ownership for in this country. They already know more than I did. They are difficult conversations to have, but they are not impossible conversations to have with our children. Of course, we frame them in a language that helps them understand.

Really, what's critical for any person who saw the lineup of those little shoes at the Legislature yesterday – we brought our own pairs of shoes, Mr. Speaker. Each of my kids placed them next to the other pairs. I wanted them to understand that but for the lucky circumstances of their birth, this could be them. That's what I want my children to understand, that sense of empathy, and they do get it. Children very fundamentally have this incredible capacity for empathy. It doesn't take much for my children to connect with that. You know, simply said, for my children, what they understand is that certain children, because of who they were, because of the colour of their skin, because of their parents and their heritage and their culture and their tradition, were separated from their parents. Any child can appreciate how upsetting, how wrong that is.

It is a conversation that can very well be had with children and must be had with children. When I talked to my children yesterday before we went to the vigil and explained what was happening, the question that my daughter, six years old, asked me – she was very concerned about the idea that these kinds of schools still exist. When I told her that they don't still exist, she seemed relieved. She said: “Okay. Good.” I said to her, “But they did exist when I was in

school.” I graduated from high school, from our education system, in 1995, a year before the last residential school closed in this country. That means my peers, children who were my age, were attending residential school at the same time that I wasn’t, and I never knew it. I never learned about it. I didn’t hear about it. I wanted her to understand that it wasn’t that far in the past.

Now, for a six-year-old, 25 years ago does seem like a very long time ago, so she didn’t quite comprehend that this was still recent history. Most importantly, she doesn’t understand – and we didn’t have this fulsome conversation yesterday. I understand, particularly in my capacity as critic for Children’s Services, that that is not just history, that residential schools are not something of the past. They are actually, incredibly, unfortunately, something very much of our present. We see that every day in the intergenerational trauma that has been imposed upon indigenous people in Alberta, across this country, and the inequities that they suffer every day.

Nowhere is that clearer, I believe, although we can certainly point to so many things in our criminal justice system and the health care system and the education system, than, absolutely, in the child intervention system. We still have a gross overrepresentation of indigenous children in our child intervention system. Unfortunately, the word “crisis” doesn’t seem like it’s relevant because it’s been that way for decades, and we’ve made so little progress on it. It is frustrating, Mr. Speaker, because this is the continued trauma that’s being imposed upon indigenous families of having their children taken away from them and not being placed in homes where they can learn and be connected to their cultures and their traditions.

I, by no means, mean to stand here and suggest that it is easy to fix these problems, these generational problems, but we have to take it seriously, and we have to be committed in a very profound way to addressing our child intervention system. I don’t think, Mr. Speaker, it’s an accident that the first calls to action, the first six calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are about child welfare. I mean, I think they’re all important – all 94 calls to action are important – but in the first six, right off the top, we’re talking about child intervention. Really, the act of taking indigenous children out of their families, severing their ties to their culture and their community, traumatizing those families over and over again, is the same trauma as residential schools. It is ripping families apart, and indigenous children are paying the price for that.

Those calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission talk about a lot of things that in Alberta we took some steps to try to address, and I again do not want to stand here and say that any government has perfectly handled these situations, but under the former government there was the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. As mentioned, it was an all-party panel because it’s not a partisan issue, because addressing the overrepresentation of indigenous children in care is something all Albertans should be concerned about and should be focused on.

That panel came out with a number of recommendations. Actually, I shouldn’t say recommendations. The panel came out with recommendations, but an action plan was adopted by the government. These were commitments, not recommendations. They were commitments to take certain actions, and to do that, Mr. Speaker, because there are very concrete things that we can do and that we must do, that ministerial panel came up with a number of recommendations that recognized that it was not easy to solve some of these issues.

When we’re talking about the overrepresentation of indigenous children in care, we have to talk about cultural connections. We have to talk about cultural understanding in the agencies and the staff who work in child intervention. We have to talk about funding supports for parenting services. We have to make sure that children

who have disabilities – and let’s be very clear: many, many children in the child intervention system disproportionately have moderate and severe disabilities, complex needs. That needs to be recognized in our child intervention system. Those actions set out in the ministerial panel were very concrete. They were absolute actions and with timelines.

While I appreciate that we are in a sort of collaborative setting here – we’re all committed in this Assembly here today to talk about these issues and to talk about what we can be doing as an Assembly – I do think it is frustrating, Mr. Speaker, for Albertans that we are not getting transparency right now on the implementation of that action plan. That may be because – and I raised this question today in the House. It is entirely possible that those actions, the ones I talked about – supporting children with disabilities, children with complex needs, establishing equitable funding for children in the child intervention system, whether they are off-reserve or on-reserve – are incredibly important actions, and we need to know, Albertans need to know, and indigenous people need to know how we’re doing on that.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the stats don’t look good. I’m not here to be partisan about it. I’m not trying to sit here and say – it’s incredibly challenging work, but the statistics show that this action plan was implemented three years ago. In three years and, I have to say, particularly over the last two years we have seen no progress in terms of reducing the percentage of children in care who are indigenous. We are seeing an increase in the number of indigenous children who have died who were receiving intervention services, an increase particularly in those young people who receive services over the age of 18, between the ages of 18 and 24.

The statistics don’t look good, Mr. Speaker, but what we don’t know is: why? Is it because the action plan – maybe those commitments and actions that were put forward by the all-party panel and that were accepted by the government and put forward in the action plan are not working. That’s entirely possible, but we cannot fix that, we cannot address that unless we know that. Are they working? What are the measures to show that they are working? As I’ve indicated, the measures right now don’t look good.

We also don’t know if the reason why the statistics don’t look better is because they’re not being implemented. We don’t know, Mr. Speaker. A number of those actions have very concrete outcomes. According to that action plan, by now, in 2021, an all-party panel should have been convened to look at amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act so that that could be passed. Well, actually, amendments were supposed to be passed late last year to include the role of the band designate, to determine alternative permanency placements that were more culturally appropriate. That was supposed to have already taken place, by the end of last year. Those amendments did not come forward. There is no all-party panel committee that’s been drawn up to look at, overall, how to incorporate indigenous understandings into our Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

5:10

I don’t know and this Assembly doesn’t know and, most importantly, Albertans don’t know if that work is being done, and even if it is being done, how effective is it? Just as much as I don’t want to stand here and say that that action plan is going to answer all the challenges facing indigenous children in the child intervention system, I also don’t want to stand here and say that we should continue on with that action plan if it’s not working. If it requires change, if there are outcomes or strategies or resources that need to be provided differently than what was in the action plan, we should also be hearing about that, but we’re not, Mr. Speaker. It’s

silence. This is the core of the problem when we're talking about indigenous families and indigenous children, that there's been silence for too long.

It is those unmarked graves of children, that didn't even have their names. Their parents didn't even know that they died in some cases, and the federal government told them that they couldn't have the remains of their children because it cost too much to send them back to them. It doesn't take a parent to understand how horrifying that is. Certainly, any parent in this Assembly can appreciate how horrifying that is. So the very least that we can offer, that we need to offer, is transparency. We cannot do better if we don't know what's happening and if it's being effective or not. We need transparency on that action plan because we cannot address the ongoing traumas of residential schools, that are being borne by generation after generation of indigenous families in this province, without taking a very clear and open approach to how we're addressing our child intervention system.

I want to pick up on a comment that my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West made, that we don't have to wait for the feds. That is really important, because for too long in this jurisdictional dance that we do in this country of saying, "Not our responsibility; that's the federal government's responsibility," the federal government says, "Oh, that's not our responsibility" or "We don't know enough about education or child intervention; that's the province's responsibility." Meanwhile generations of indigenous people are left not only in between, but they are left with inequitable services, a lower quality of living, a lower quality of supports when they deserve so much more.

I worked in the education field for a long time, and I saw that dance happening around education on-reserve. "Oh, that's the federal government's responsibility." "Oh, but the province is the one who has the knowledge, you know, about how to deliver education." Who's going to provide the funding? That's really what it comes down to, Mr. Speaker. It's always about funding. That's what it's about, and that's why Jordan's principle was so important, because it said: enough; we are not going to let children fall through the gaps anymore simply because of a jurisdictional dispute between the federal and provincial governments.

[The Speaker in the chair]

When it comes to child welfare, I fear, Mr. Speaker, that the same is happening right now. We know that there is Bill C-92, brought in by the federal government, that will allow indigenous groups to have their own child intervention system as they see fit. They can establish it subject to some standards set out in that legislation, and that's a good thing. However, it's incredibly up in the air right now. There is a lot that has not been determined around funding and around supports for that, and in the meantime indigenous children continue to fall through the cracks. In the meantime there is inequitable funding on-reserve as opposed to off-reserve. So this dance that we do – and I've heard this government say that we can't take action on certain pieces of the action plan because of Bill C-92. I get that it's tricky, but I don't accept – and we should not accept – delays any longer.

The action plan from the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention committed to equitable funding for on-reserve and off-reserve child intervention services, full stop. To date this government has said that they commit to and support and are following through on that action plan, so I think Albertans need to have an answer as to whether or not that's actually taking place, that that work is happening. I don't think Albertans or indigenous children and indigenous families need to hear the same old excuse that they've heard for so long, that, oh, it's a jurisdictional dispute, that there's

something going on with the federal government, that we're going to wait to see how that works. No. They have been waiting for centuries in this province and in this country to be treated equitably. I'm asking for transparency because I believe that is so important, Mr. Speaker. There is no reconciliation without truth. We need to know, Albertans deserve to know, indigenous peoples deserve to know what's happening with changes to our child intervention system.

Lastly, I want to echo the comments from some of my colleagues around the trauma that many, many indigenous peoples are experiencing right now. I see it. I'm hearing it. I'm sure we all are as we reel from the news of these 215 children in unmarked graves. So I want to echo the call for any of those who need support to contact the national residential school crisis line. It is a 24-hour crisis line, and that phone number is 1.866.925.4419.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on this sad moment but happy to address the Chamber on this topic of the 215 individuals, children, in the unmarked grave in Kamloops. These children were a product of residential schools, and I think it's first important to point out the truth of the fact that the residential schools were part of a systematic taking away and destroying of families, particularly indigenous families in Canada. It was an abject injustice. I think it is wrong in all cases to steal children away from their parents, from their families. It is something that is shameful, of course, and its tragedy was born out of a set of what are, frankly, racist policies in Canada's history. I think it is made all the more egregious because of the way that it played out with these families and children. The individuals who were taken from their families, these children, had nowhere to turn with a government that intentionally would persecute them because of their culture and their heritage, and the church, an organization that should be a place for vulnerable people to turn to be supported, that partook in this egregious act of injustice, which I think makes it all the more difficult to stomach.

It's important that we as a society recognize our history because we are a product of it now. We cannot and we should not separate ourselves from our history. Recognizing this injustice, these evils, the sheer tragedy of finding 215 children buried in an unmarked grave is something that should not go on unpassed in the Legislature today. It is good that we set aside our ordinary business. I myself was excited, prior to hearing the news, to talk about business that I was bringing to the House in private members' time. Private members' time is important time in the Legislature, but more important is addressing these social issues, where we have our province-wide debate and discussion and conversation in this Chamber if nowhere else. Sadly, often we find our most honest conversation happening outside these four walls. I'm glad to see that we have a lot of honest conversation happening here today.

I want to highlight two speeches that preceded me from members of both sides of the aisle, that I very much appreciated and that touched me deeply, Mr. Speaker. One is from a colleague from the opposition benches, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, who had very personal and heartfelt stories to talk about in her connection to the Métis community and to herself being Métis. I want to also highlight the comments made by my colleague on the same side of the aisle, and that's the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations, for the work that he has done and the very honest, humble speech that he gave, which I believe was right from the heart and, to me, I think,

in my experience, will be appreciated by many of our First Nation and Métis Albertans because they're honest people.

They have gone through such hardship and tragedy that it's tough not to be honest after seeing that as a community but also people who, I have to say, as a side note, appreciate humour more than almost any other Albertan, and when days like this come along, it is important to remember that they know the tragedy that their culture has gone through and, nonetheless, find the time to joke in the midst of talking about it. I couldn't imagine popping many jokes in this speech, Mr. Speaker. I'd feel very out of place. But I have spoken to many First Nation indigenous leaders in my community that joke all the time and find a certain amount of appropriate humour and levity, because what else can you do after you've gone through it? I find that speaks to the very earnest demeanour that every First Nation community that I've been to has and the people and the culture that they have. I think it's important that we recognize that, that they are a people with a culture, that they're a part of Alberta, they're part of our heritage and our history, and so is this moment in our history that we're talking about. It is real, it happened, and we have to recognize it.

5:20

A theme that I found come up over and over again in almost every speech I've heard so far today has been a focus on the importance of the family, whether that be talking about the situation with your own children, as we heard from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, talking about your family relationship, as we heard from the Member for Edmonton-Manning, talking about your own childhood and your time with your friends in First Nation communities, as we heard from the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations, and heard from the Member for Cardston-Siksika, who spoke a lot about his family as well.

I think that it's important to highlight that what has happened in Alberta and across all of Canada with the residential schools is a deliberate, intentional destruction of First Nation families, targeted because of their community, because of ethnicity, because of their culture and their heritage. I think that is very sad. I believe in families, Mr. Speaker, and I believe particularly in indigenous families.

It was the destruction of the family in so many ways that has led us to where we are today. Many factors are there, but when the government and the church and civil society and your community was not there to support you – in fact, they were a part of this aggression – where else could you turn but your family? And that was taken from them. A wedge driven between mother and daughter, father and son, parent and child. “A wedge driven” is too light a term; ripped from these families. That is the foundation of our society, of any society: a family.

The ability to love unconditionally your children, your siblings, your parents: to take that away from them in the most physical and abrupt of ways is going to leave and has left one of the most damaging legacies that our country has ever produced. That is what many of the First Nations in my communities live through. Whether they personally went through it, have a family member that did, or have that collective memory of the experience they've gone through as First Nation and Métis people, it's been devastating, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that because, first and foremost, they have nowhere to turn as a family, they will continue to feel that devastation. It will be healing, first and foremost, through the family, I believe, that will bring the most solace.

We all have responsibilities, I myself as a representative, to speak on behalf of my constituents and speak to my constituents on this topic. This Chamber, with this motion, of course is important. The action of the government following through afterwards is

important. But I believe that there is no substitute, no alternative for the repairing of the family in these communities. It will fundamentally be the make or break on whether or not these families feel a sense of reconciliation, a sense of peace at the end of it.

I believe firmly in the family, and I heard that earlier from members on both sides of the aisle, that they do, too. They believe that children should be with their parents. Gosh, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning said that, I thought: that is an animating description of why I am here, in so many ways. I believe in the power of the family. I believe that that unconditional bond of love shouldn't be broken, not least of which by the body meant to protect you. We as a government are here to protect and to provide the conditions necessary for thriving in our society, and our predecessors in elected office did the opposite. That's sad, Mr. Speaker. It is tragic in the truest sense of that word and needs to be acknowledged here today.

I ask, now turning to my constituents, that those members of my constituency who have gone through this tragedy either personally – and I have met a number who have been to residential schools. I ask them to continue working with this government, working with representatives such as myself to move through this. I ask all those who are affected by it indirectly, the long-lasting effects that are real and are here today, to try and find an ability to work with their community to rebuild those bonds, to invest in their family that has been destroyed systemically by government, by bodies that are there to protect you and did the opposite.

I also want to speak particularly to the wider community, not just the First Nations and Métis in my area, and ask them to do the same thing I stood up and did today: speak about this to acknowledge the reality of this hardship that they have gone through, to be a leader in your community, to be a leader in your family, to be a leader in your friend group.

Mr. Speaker, where I live, everyone knows First Nations and Métis people. It's not a distant thing. Business day to day, sports day to day, school day to day, your church community, your volunteering: we interact. We live together. I'm asking the wider community in my constituency to reach out, to be supportive, to acknowledge the tragedy of what's happened, to empathize with what that must be like to go through as a society, as a community. I ask that they take a step up and be a leader within their community and encourage others to be sympathetic and empathetic.

I have seen instances of racism in my community – of course, I have – towards First Nation and Métis people. It's sad to see. It's often born out of ignorance, and it could very well be otherwise. I'm asking you now in my constituency to reach out, be a community builder, create a relationship that transcends any differences of cultural, ethnic, racial differences, and find a bond with those people on the other side so that you feel more connected to them than you did before. I think that is more meaningful than almost any language or any words or any motions we can pass here. On the ground in Alberta, with fellow Albertans, find a connection, Mr. Speaker. I believe that is fundamental and the heart of the next steps forward. I know that it's something I'm going to be doing with my First Nation communities going forward.

Today this conversation in the House has reminded me again of what sometimes can slip from the top of your mind, how important it is to keep these community members a vibrant part of our province and our society. They've contributed so much. I appreciate all of my First Nation community members in the Peace River constituency, and I am truly sorry and sad for the tragedy they've gone through, the direct and deliberate attack and destruction of the family that happened for generations. I fundamentally do trust and hope that we will be through this. There will be a time when these

wounds have been healed. It will require effort on our parts, and it will require, I think, more than anything else, faith in our families again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on this topic a little bit. I'm sure that many members of this House were contacted by numerous constituents over the weekend and again today. The common theme seems to be: "Oh, my gosh, what can we do? What can we do other than going to a vigil and acknowledging some of the harms?" That seems to be the question. I think some of my colleagues have said it perfectly, that the first step is acknowledging the truth. It is indeed a very ugly truth, that is far deeper and wider than just the news that we got recently.

I represent a community, the city of St. Albert, that is a beautiful community. But it also has a history that is very much tied to some of things that we're talking about today. As you may know, there are two sites in St. Albert that were residential schools, the first on the Poundmaker land, and the second was called Youville, a St. Albert residential school, which currently sits atop the Seven Hills in St. Albert. If you're ever in St. Albert, you just look up from the downtown and you can see the structure is there, and that's where it was.

5:30

I know that the city is very well aware of their history and I think has worked very hard to acknowledge some of that history. They have done a lot of things. They have invested in the Michif cultural centre. You can look online to see some of the amazing programming that comes out of there. There's also the healing garden, but it's more than just a garden; it's a tool for teaching. I know that the schools do use it. And I would like to note, although it sounds very simple, that at every city event, really – and that extends to the chamber of commerce and to other events – there is always a sincere land acknowledgement. I would like to put it to government that that is something that was eliminated very quickly after the UCP took power. Although it doesn't sound like a big action, it is really important. This is all about truth today.

I did get a number of e-mails. Just recently, actually, I was copied on an e-mail by – some of you may know him. He is a prominent Albertan. His name is Kristopher Wells, and he's lived in St. Albert for I guess about four decades. He's written to the mayor and council and asked them to consider an inquiry about these two particular schools but also to go further and to really look at the city's capacity in terms of naming, as many communities and buildings right across the province, right across the country, bear the names of, you know, people that were instrumental in furthering the residential schools and perpetuating the atrocities. Not that they did them themselves, but their beliefs and their teachings and their policies did, ultimately. He's asking for that work to be done, and I know that I have been contacted by all kinds of people just really asking for action. So hopefully some truth and then, ultimately, some action.

One of the things I would like to do – there's so much to be said about the tragedies, but there is the one school. One of the schools is the Youville residential school. You know, if anyone ever gets out to St. Albert, just to spend some time out there where that site was, you can have a look at some of the memorials there. I would like people to know that there are some names that have been – some children have been named. In fact, in this one particular school, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation has

actually named 44 children that died there. Of course, there are others that we don't know. Local people in St. Albert often talk about the fact that they are concerned that there are unmarked graves on the Seven Hills site. That's actually a very prominent sort of recreation area in the city.

As I look through this list of these children – and I do want to spend the remaining time sort of focused on this – it's incredible because so many of these names are family names of people that I know in St. Albert or in Morinville or in Sturgeon county. In fact, some of the last names of these children you can find on street signs. Unfortunately, we can also find on street signs and in some schools and other buildings names of other people. But I wanted to read some of those names, and for poor *Hansard* all of these names can be found on the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website.

These are just some of the children, and I think so often we become – just like COVID has taught us. At first I think we were stunned and appalled and shocked when we heard that two people died or eight people died or 24 people died, another eight died, another seven died. We recently heard that the remains of over 200 children were found, but every single one of those people, those children, were part of a family, and we lose out because they aren't with us. They didn't leave their legacy. They could have been teachers or politicians or Premiers or leaders or doctors or whatever they would have been, but they're no longer here.

I just wanted to read some of their names out. These are only 43 of who knows how many. These are from the St. Albert residential school, which is on the Youville site: A. Thibert, Adam Bearhead, Adelaide Pictwiwesin, Agnes Cartwright, Alexis Rain, Bella Callihoo, Ben Albert Foley, Bessie Gouchier, Camille Charbonneau, Caroline Paul, Christine Burnstick, Cyprien Gaucher, Daniel Kootenay, Daniel Moise, Dolphus Lefthand, Ellen Toomah, Eddie L'Hirondelle, Flora Paul, Florence Paul, Frank Burke, Irene Teresa Cardinal, Isabelle Huppe, Isabelle Ward, Jennie Toomah, Joachin Coutepatte, Joseph Kisikisewiskan, Joseph Paul, Josephine Arcand, Justine Kitikaw, Lina Hironcelle, Lucie Bruneau, M.E. Kamkaweke, Maggie Maminowata, Maria Pepin, Marie Aquasis, Mary Ann Delorme, Michel Kanamatchew, Milly Kamamatchew, Ole Johnson Peter, Rosalie Paul, Simon Napotokan, Sophie Rains, also Mary Rose Arcand.

These are just 43 from one of the sites in St. Albert, and they only found a few that were attached to the other site, which is on the Poundmaker land, but of course we know that there are many unmarked graves there. There are so many. Like my colleague from Lethbridge-West mentioned, the government has the ability and the power to identify, to do all of the work, to map it, to identify, do more than a website.

Truth and reconciliation requires investment and resources. It requires a lens to look at all of the policies. We've heard about child intervention. We've talked about poverty endlessly. We've talked about all of these issues. We've talked about the importance of education, of inclusive education. We've talked about all of these things.

In fact, sadly, you know, recently there was a statement, on December 15, 2020. I'm going to end with this. This was five years after – I'm just going to read it. The Hon. Murray Sinclair, Chief Wilton Littlechild, and Dr. Marie Wilson: I'm just going to read a little bit of what they said. This was their public statement on the fifth anniversary of the final report of truth and reconciliation in Canada. It said:

Five years ago today, we stood together with residential school Survivors to present the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. [It reminded us that]

Canadians from all walks of life embraced the Calls to Action with a sense of urgency, purpose, and unity.

The statement goes on. They say:

Essential foundations for reconciliation have yet to be implemented, despite government commitments.

We see that right across our country at all levels of government. This isn't about pointing fingers or partisanship. The people that have the power to make those changes and make those investments: the responsibility lies squarely on their shoulders. In fact, the Hon. Murray Sinclair, Chief Wilton Littlechild, and Dr. Marie Wilson said:

In some jurisdictions, there is danger of losing gains . . . we also see worrying signs, such as the political roll back of progress made in public school curricula in Alberta and Ontario.

The reason that I mention part of this statement is that it has been five years. Five years. Sadly, I'm hoping that the shock of remains of over 200 children will jar us all as Canadians into demanding action, demanding that we all speak the truth and we demand action. It's not enough to wear a T-shirt or a ribbon or to be sad or go to a ceremony. This is work that needs to be done all year long, every day.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. the Premier.

5:40

Mr. Kenney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with sadness, great sadness, that I rise to enter into this debate provoked by the shocking discovery last week of some 215 graves of buried children at the former site of the Indian residential school near Kamloops, British Columbia.

While we say it is shocking, Mr. Speaker, it really shouldn't shock any of us because we do know – we have known for a very long time in this country about the terrible, profound injustice and great suffering which followed from the entire system of what was called Indian residential schools from the 1880s on until the 1970s. The Canadian state used its power to separate children from their families. There are very few abuses of government power which are more shockingly grotesque than this, tens and tens of thousands of children forcibly taken away from their families, violating the sovereignty of those families, their natural unity, the love between parents and their children. The sad event of the discovery of last week reminds us all that far too many of those children never returned.

It is estimated, Mr. Speaker, that some 3,000 records were made of children who died while attending residential schools, but the missing children and unmarked burials project of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission summarizes compelling historical evidence that the actual number of children who died at residential schools was likely much greater but was unreported. What we do know from the missing children and unmarked burials report of the TRC is that some 557 children died at residential schools in Alberta, and their names are recorded in the register. Altogether, 821 children were recorded as having died at schools in this province, both named and unnamed, but the historical record suggests, as I say, that the numbers could be much greater than that.

For example, a report by the principal at the Piikani and the Old Sun schools from the 1890s indicates that the death rate amongst all the students enrolled over their period of enrolment was as high as 49 per cent. That doesn't mean 49 per cent of the students died, but over the period of sometimes 12 years. Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely clear that the death rate for children at these schools was orders of magnitude higher than for the general population.

It is true that these deaths occurred at a time when we did not have the same advancements in modern medicine, when we did not have penicillin to fight infections and when we did not have vaccines to combat infectious diseases like tuberculosis. It's true that huge numbers of deaths occurred in our broader society in those decades of the 1890s through the 1940s from such maladies as tuberculosis. It's true that apparently nearly half of the deaths in the Indian residential schools were attributable to tuberculosis, and the other two leading causes were pneumonia and influenza. But, Mr. Speaker, the incidence of these diseases and their fatality was orders of magnitude greater in the Indian residential school settings than they were in the general population, and one of the clear reasons for that, for which the historical record is absolutely clear, is that many of these children were forced to live in deplorable, unsafe, and substandard conditions.

Many of them also died due to what was known as accidental causes, but often, Mr. Speaker, that meant a total lack of fire safety. It meant a total lack of basic safety precautions, of proper infrastructure at so many of these schools. Some of these children, Mr. Speaker, most tragically died from suicide or from running away from the schools where they felt tormented, only to die in the wilderness, sometimes frozen in the middle of the winter.

Too many of those children were buried in unmarked graves, and even those whose names were recorded: in too many cases no effort was made to return their remains to their families. They were taken from their families as though they were property of the state, never to be returned. Mr. Speaker, the discovery of last week simply makes this real for so many of us who've known, historically, the reality of this, but it forces us to contemplate the individual tragedies, each and every one of them, without number.

Now, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, of course, made a number of recommendations. In fact, I think it's worth noting that the late former Premier of this province, the hon. Jim Prentice, was the minister of aboriginal affairs in 2007, when this issue first was brought to light by the then commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and he mandated as the federal minister of aboriginal affairs that a specific project be led on researching the reality of missing children and unmarked burials.

Very important work was done, and important recommendations were made. For example, the commission called

upon all chief coroners and provincial vital statistics agencies that have not provided to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada their records on the deaths of Aboriginal children in the care of residential school authorities to make these documents available to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation,

because throughout, they say, the history of Canada's residential school system there was no organized effort to record the number of students who died in residence each year across the system, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, prompted by the tragic discovery of last week, I today asked the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations to work with his counterpart the hon. Minister of Service Alberta to ensure that the government of Alberta has done everything possible to meet call to action 71, which I've just recited. The truth is that I understand we have very poor archival records from that period, but I think we should all as members want to be sure that no stone is left unturned to provide every possible assistance to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, we have called upon the government of Canada to redouble its efforts to assist First Nations communities with identifying their deceased. A great deal of work was done by the missing children and unmarked burials project of the commission, but they've identified that yet more work needs to be done. It is, I think, very likely, from what we know, that there may be unmarked

cemeteries and certainly unmarked graves here in Alberta. In some cases those residential schools were destroyed 100 years ago or more, with them many traces of graves, but with modern technology being employed, satellite imagery, we hope that any areas adjacent to those former residential school sites can be researched forensically to identify any human remains.

Mr. Speaker, every culture and every religious faith regards the remains of the deceased with a special sense of sanctity, and I think perhaps this is why the discovery of these graves shocks us so much, because, of course, it calls to mind in a very visceral way the gross injustice of the entire residential school system, but it also suggests a kind of, dare I say, carelessness, of disregard, of desecration of the lives and certainly the remains of those children as young as the age of three.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government of Alberta I can assure the Assembly and Albertans that both with respect to implementing call to action 71 and collaborating with First Nations, Métis communities as well as the government of Canada, we will do everything we can to be helpful. Should the government of Canada require logistical assistance, if there's anything in the Provincial Archives that could be helpful to identify lost remains in Alberta, I know that the Minister and Department of Indigenous Relations and other departments will do everything within their power to be helpful. In many cases these may be the remains of people who have no living known relatives, but that does not matter. We still have an obligation.

You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the mandates which I took most closely to heart during my time serving as a federal minister in Ottawa was leading Canada's Holocaust education, commemoration, and research efforts, and we helped some of the remarkable research that's being done in central and eastern Europe to find the lost and hidden remains of Jews and others who were the victims of mass murder by the Nazi regime, in particular the Einsatzgruppen, that marched through eastern Europe razing Jewish villages. I saw first-hand, through the work of the Jesuit priest and archaeologist Father Patrick Desbois, the remarkable work that's been done that has helped to uncover hundreds of forgotten and lost cemeteries across eastern Europe and identify the remains of hundreds of thousands of the deceased. That work of memory is sacred work. It was the Czech novelist Milan Kundera who said that the difference between freedom and tyranny is the difference between remembering and forgetting. We have an obligation to remember. For the deceased that begins with identifying where the remains lie.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Official Opposition for proposing this motion. I understand that there's an agreement on accepting a proposed government amendment to specify implementation of the commission's call to action 71. I thank the Minister of Indigenous Relations for his leadership and outreach to the community. I thank, most importantly, all of the brave former residents and students of the Indian residential schools for having refused to forget, for having kept alive the memory of their friends, of their experience. We all owe them a debt of gratitude for speaking these uncomfortable truths. We owe a debt of gratitude to the First Nations leaders in British Columbia who continued to search for this unmarked cemetery. One way that we can discharge that debt of gratitude is to do our part to find all of the last remains and to continue the broader work of reconciliation, which is never over.

I had the privilege of attending school with many First Nations students from across western Canada, from Alberta and Saskatchewan in particular, many of whom have gone on to become

chiefs and leaders in their own communities. Mr. Speaker, I can say that their leadership, the leadership of a new generation of indigenous leaders in this province and in this country, is very much proudly rooted in their past – in their heritage, in their culture, in their traditional languages – while also being with eyes clearly fixed on the future, we all hope a future that overcomes this legacy of injustice, of inhumanity and a future that will ensure full opportunity, particularly for the First Nations people, the first to build communities on this land, who were denied the right of family life, the right to access their language, their culture, their traditional spiritual practices in a horrendous policy of a century that was so inhumane.

Mr. Speaker, thank you to all members who have participated in this debate. I look forward to the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations reporting back to this Assembly in the weeks to come about whatever additional information Alberta may have that can help the healing and additional actions that the government can take to identify the lost remains and to continue the work of reconciliation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are approximately three minutes remaining prior to the 6 o'clock end of the debate.

Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour. I only have three minutes. I could most certainly speak for 20, 30 days. Two hundred and fifteen kids. Two hundred and fifteen. Of course, I stand here as a settler on Treaty 6 territory. You can hear it in my voice. I'm heartbroken. I'm surprised. I know that when many of us posted about this, what did indigenous folks tell us? They told us that they weren't surprised, that they weren't shocked, that it was exactly what they knew and what survivors had told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I want to quickly end, I think, by talking a little bit about what we can all do. I wanted to share stories. I wanted to talk about doing more than just politicians giving speeches. I wanted to talk about the stories of so many of the incredible indigenous leaders and elders whom I've had a chance to talk to. I know people are watching at home. They're telling us they are, and they're listening. I know indigenous folks are listening.

What can you do? You can learn about the impacts of the indigenous residential school system. You can read the 94 recommendations of the TRC. You can contact us: MLAs, MPs, your local representatives. You can actively listen to people who are indigenous; you can hear their stories. You can stand up to discrimination, to prejudice, to stereotypes. You can have conversations with everybody in your life, with your family, your friends. You can be respectful to trauma survivors and elders. You can support indigenous-led community organizations. You can be empathetic, patient, and receptive, and you can raise awareness. Those are all recommendations from the Indian Residential School Survivors Society of British Columbia. I know so many folks out there want to know what else they can do. They want our country, they want our province, they want us to move forward together. They don't want empty words from politicians. They know that sorry is not enough. They want real action.

So I'm calling on this entire House, this entire Chamber to do better, to take it seriously. We've heard some pretty powerful words today, and I am grateful, truly, that both sides of the House were able to come together and to talk about this, but, again, words aren't enough. We must act.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt. However, it is now 6 o'clock, and I am required to put all questions necessary to the Assembly at the conclusion of the debate on the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South and amended by the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the House stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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