



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Bill 215, Seniors Advocate Act
Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act

Tuesday, April 20, 2021
9 a.m.

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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Evan Romanow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Service Delivery, Health

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9 a.m.

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

[Mr. Ellis in the chair]

The Chair: All right. Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Mike Ellis, the MLA for Calgary-West and chair of the committee. I'd like to ask members and those joining the committee at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and then I will call on those joining in by videoconference. We'll begin to my right.

Mr. Schow: Joseph Schow, MLA for Cardston-Siksika.

Ms Sigurdson: Lori Sigurdson, MLA for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Dang: Good morning. Thomas Dang, Edmonton-South.

Mr. Nielsen: Good morning, everyone. Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Koenig: Good morning. I'm Trafton Koenig with the Parliamentary Counsel office.

Mr. Kulicki: Good morning. Michael Kulicki, clerk of committees and research services.

Mr. Huffman: Good morning. Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: Okay. I'll call on members joining via videoconference. Member Irwin, could you introduce yourself, please.

Member Irwin: Janis Irwin, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Chair: Thank you.
Member Dach.

Mr. Dach: Good morning. Member Lorne Dach, MLA for Edmonton-McClung.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Shane Getson.

Mr. Getson: Good morning. Shane Getson, MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

The Chair: Thank you.
Member R.J. Sigurdson.

Mr. Sigurdson: Good morning, everyone. R.J. Sigurdson, MLA for Highwood.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Mickey Amery.

Mr. Amery: Good morning, Chair. Good morning, committee members. Mickey Amery, MLA, Calgary-Cross.

The Chair: Thank you.
Member Glasgo.

Ms Glasgo: Good morning, everyone. Michaela Glasgo, MLA, Brooks-Medicine Hat.

The Chair: Thank you.
Member Brad Rutherford.

Mr. Rutherford: Good morning. Brad Rutherford, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

The Chair: Fantastic.

Okay. For the record I will note the following substitution: Member Lorne Dach for Member Lori Sigurdson.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Pursuant to the February 22, 2021, memo from the hon. Speaker Cooper I would remind everyone of the updated committee room protocols, which encourage members to wear masks in committee rooms and while seated except when speaking, at which time they may choose not to wear a face mask covering. Based on the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health regarding physical distancing, attendees at today's meeting are reminded to leave the appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants.

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To request to be put on the speakers list, members participating virtually are asked to e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please wave or otherwise signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Next we'll go to the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the draft agenda?

Hearing and seeing none, could I get somebody to move the agenda? Mr. Nielsen. Thank you. Mr. Nielsen moves that the agenda for the April 20, 2021, meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills be adopted as distributed. All those in favour, say aye. On the videoconference? Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none, that motion has been carried.

Next we'll go to the approval of the minutes. Hon. members, we have the minutes of our last meeting, on April 13, to review. Are there any errors or omissions to note?

Hearing and seeing none, could I get a member to move the approval of the minutes?

Mr. Schow: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Schow will move that the minutes of the April 13, 2021, meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills be approved as distributed. All those in favour, say aye. On the videoconference? Thank you. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none, that motion has been carried.

All right. Next we'll move to the review of Bill 215, the Seniors Advocate Act, and a presentation by Member Lori Sigurdson, the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview. Hon. members, Bill 215, the Seniors Advocate Act, was referred to the committee on Wednesday, April 15, 2021, in accordance with Standing Order 74.11, and the committee's report to the Assembly is due on May 6.

At this time I'd like to invite Member Lori Sigurdson to provide a five-minute presentation. Then I'll open the floor to questions from the committee members. At this time – thank you, Member, for being here – the floor is yours.

Bill 215, Seniors Advocate Act

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to present Bill 215, the Seniors Advocate Act. As a member of this committee I have heard many presentations from MLAs. I have especially appreciated the opportunity for the committee to invite stakeholders and learn more about how legislation affects Albertans.

First, I want to take a moment and recognize the over 1,200 residents who passed away due to COVID-19 while living in continuing care facilities. We know that many of these deaths were preventable. COVID has hit seniors the hardest. Tragically, according to the Ryerson institute on aging Alberta had the highest number of outbreaks in continuing care facilities in Canada. COVID-19 has exposed many gaps in seniors' care and seniors' services. The pandemic has highlighted problems of seniors' isolation, ageism, and systemic problems in continuing care facilities. I have heard from numerous Albertans reporting that their loved ones are isolated, left in their own waste for long periods of time, and of chronic staff shortages, creating an abundance of daily problems.

As the critic for Seniors and Housing and the former minister many Albertans have reached out to me calling for reform in the way seniors are supported in this province. This bill, Bill 215: when I drew that number, the Legislature did not prorogue, and it gave me the opportunity to draft legislation which I fundamentally believe would improve the lives of seniors.

If passed, this bill will establish a Seniors Advocate as an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. The role of this office would be to help Albertans navigate seniors' programs on an individual level while also reviewing larger, systemic issues. The Seniors Advocate would make recommendations to the government regarding ways to improve the system.

Seniors' programs are complex. The government offers services across many ministries. It's easy to misunderstand the programs and even not be aware of what programs are available due to this complexity. A key issue for seniors is navigating the health system and continuing care, but it is so much more than that. Seniors need support with housing, social supports, financial supports, transportation, and personal care.

I know that members of the government caucus may have been told by the Minister of Health or the Minister of Seniors and Housing that there is no need for a Seniors Advocate because the Health Advocate is providing the needed services. I wish this were true, but I have reviewed her report and listened to Albertans, and she is not speaking about seniors' concerns. In fact, she only identifies the number of cases she has undertaken, with no discussion of the concerns in her most recent report. In addition, the number of cases over the year has largely been unchanged despite her new responsibilities. Over a thousand cases seem to have vanished, with no one supporting seniors that need help.

I encourage my colleagues on this committee to allow stakeholders to be invited so that we may hear from Albertans who have worked and interacted with the previous advocate. We know that only about 30 per cent of the casework was health related. While I was Minister of Seniors and Housing, the advocate was a part of the government, and I was appreciative of our regular meetings. She was an expert as she had worked as a sociology professor with a specialization in seniors at the University of Alberta for many years.

A Seniors Advocate specifically focused on seniors' issues was a good first step. Creating an independent office will give the advocate increased power to influence the government as well as put forward creative ideas to support seniors. In B.C. the Seniors Advocate made public recommendations regarding implementing

rapid testing in continuing care homes, which the government later accepted. The B.C. advocate has also been able to conduct reviews into homes with severe outbreaks of COVID-19. This is something that could also be done under Bill 215. As I spoke to earlier in my remarks, the high number of deaths in continuing care facilities has been a tragedy. An independent Seniors Advocate could lead the work for improvements in this sector, as the B.C. advocate has.

It is painfully obvious that more needs to be done to properly care for seniors in Alberta's continuing care system. The district director of the federal association of retirees stood with me on the day I introduced this bill, sharing what a Seniors Advocate in Alberta could have done during this pandemic. He said that if Premier Kenney and Minister Pon had not eliminated the Seniors Advocate in December 2019, that valuable resource would have been there to help elderly Albertans as we dealt with the COVID pandemic; effective, timely advice and action from the government, based on the evidence presented to them from a true Seniors Advocate, would have helped mitigate that crisis.

Thank you.

9:10

The Chair: Member, you've concluded?

Ms Sigurdson: I have.

The Chair: Okay. Good. Thank you very much. Thank you for your presentation.

This, of course, is an opposition member's bill, so the convention of this committee is that we will go to a government member first. I ask all members, opposition and government members and even the presenter, to do our best to keep our questions and answers somewhat tight. We have a speakers list that's starting to grow.

That being said, we will start with Mr. Schow, with a quick question followed by a supplemental. Thank you.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak and comment on this. I thank the presenter for coming here and giving her remarks. You, Ms Sigurdson, had said that you'd had a number of pieces of correspondence from constituents concerned about the systemic issues facing our seniors in seniors' care. But you also stated that you were the minister for four years. You would like to set up an independent office for the Seniors Advocate. This is my understanding as you laid it out today. If you care so much about it, why didn't you do it when you were minister?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you for the question. I think it's a very important one. Certainly, we took the first step by creating a Seniors Advocate stand-alone office. That was the first time that had happened in Alberta, and it was a step in the right direction. Of course, this is a step further. That's similar to what happened with the Child and Youth Advocate. For a long time it reported directly to the minister. It now is an independent officer of the Legislature. This would give more power to the advocate and certainly create a champion for seniors in Alberta, that currently we're missing.

The Chair: You have a supplemental. Go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Sure. I would disagree with the last part of your statement, that we don't have a champion for seniors. I think that Minister Pon is doing an excellent job in her role as the Minister of Seniors and Housing, and I'm grateful for all of the work that she does.

Four years is a long time, Member Sigurdson. Though you took the first step, you certainly had time to take the next step, and I suspect there are subsequent steps after that. Why didn't you take

the second step, and after the second step, which would be to set up an independent office, which your bill would like to do, what would be your next step? Answer both of those, please.

Ms Sigurdson: Certainly, when we did appoint a Seniors Advocate in their stand-alone office, we always had the intention of making it independent. As you likely already know from being in government, time goes very quickly, and sometimes you can't fulfill your agenda completely. But it was always the intention of our government to make that independent, and certainly, going forward, if we're elected in 2023, that is the plan. We know that governments work best when there are checks and balances. We know that a strong government is good when there's a strong opposition. I think that having an independent officer as a Seniors Advocate would complement the work that's already being done and increase more support for seniors, which we see as so important considering what they've been through during the pandemic.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We'll next go to Member Irwin for a question and follow-up, please.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you so much to Member Sigurdson for the work that she's done. I know she's put a great deal of effort into arriving at this bill. I know she's consulted with a lot of folks, and I know she's heard from a lot of folks as well. I'm wondering if she could just share with us: who has she heard from on this bill? Has she heard from seniors? If she can just share a little bit about that.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Member Irwin. I appreciate the question. Certainly, I've heard from, talked on the phone with, and even met with many seniors across Alberta, not just my constituents but all Albertans, sometimes seniors themselves or members of their families, their loved ones, and also organizations. For example, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons has stood with me in concern about this issue as well as the Association of Federal Retirees, that has thousands of members across the province. They've also spoken publicly about this, heartbreaking stories of seniors really not receiving the support they need in the continuing care system or being isolated in their homes. I mean, it's been a really challenging time with COVID-19. We know from what's happened in B.C., who has an independent advocate, that they've had a much different and a much more positive outcome. I really think that in Alberta this could really help, again, support seniors to have the supports they need during a pandemic.

The Chair: Thank you.

A follow-up, Member Irwin.

Member Irwin: Thank you for that. I know when you asked about this in the House, the Minister of Health said something dismissive like: you're just concerned about government org charts. Can you respond to that absurd criticism? You know, like, what exactly are seniors asking for? They're not just asking for you to change some titles and move some offices around.

Ms Sigurdson: No, no. A Seniors Advocate, an independent advocate: it's a fundamental difference to what exists right now. Of course, an independent advocate reports to the Legislature as a whole. All parties receive her reports at the same time. It's not sort of screened through the communications team of the government, so we can have a much more frank, I think, and open discussion about that, and that gives the advocate more strength in bringing forward concerns and recommendations. It's not even in the org

chart, really. It's a stand-alone office that reports directly to the Assembly and, in so doing that, fundamentally shifts the level of, really, power and advocacy that the advocate can do. I think that that's a really healthy step here for us in Alberta because we've seen how much seniors have suffered during the pandemic.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Getson next, please.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Member, for bringing this forward. I guess there's a little bit of conjecture. Seniors always have a really special place in my heart, quite frankly. They're kind of the patriarchs and matriarchs that hold a lot of our families together. They're essentially the glue, that bridge and that history. Some of the characterizations, Chair and Member – I really hope that you would consider, when you're discussing such important matters and these folks who are so near and dear to us, that we really check some of the partisanship. I'd like to try to do that as well.

The other thing I'd like to make the member aware of, which she probably is but for the cameras and the other folks out there, is that Minister Pon had picked me up for about a year and half to help out on several task forces regarding seniors. The advocacy that she brings forward is second to none. Again, it's with the seniors' best interests at heart. It's with that that I'm going to ask my questions as well, because I believe, MLA Sigurdson, that that's really the intent. You don't want to make this partisan. You really are trying to look at something that you didn't get done when you were the minister that probably was a good initiative. You talked about timing. Can you please tell me why you didn't get this put in place while you were there, while you had that time? Can you tell me what those time constraints or challenges were?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Member, for the question. First of all, I'd like to say that I do have some concerns about the advocacy of Minister Pon, and one of the areas that she cut back significantly was grants to, you know, nonprofit organizations throughout the province. It was approximately \$3 million in that fund when we were government, and it's less than a million now. There have been significant cuts to supports for seniors in a very difficult time. We know there's a whole move to privatize public housing, huge cuts. Seniors often use our lodge system, many of the affordable housing systems. I guess I challenge some of your premise that Minister Pon is doing all she can. I think that she has severely cut back her budget and is not serving seniors in this province.

Certainly, that stand-alone office of the Seniors Advocate during our tenure provided significant support to me and did much education across the province to support seniors. That was a million dollars of support throughout that office that also is now not available. Certainly, whenever I've had the opportunity to question Minister Pon, for example, in estimates, she will not even mention anything about that. She just says: that's Health; that has nothing to do with me. I question some of the comments you just made, and certainly I think that an independent Seniors Advocate would make a huge difference for seniors in our province.

9:20

The Chair: Mr. Getson, you have a follow-up?

Mr. Getson: Maybe as a follow-up, Chair. Again, I tried to offer the olive branch, if you would, and quite frankly I'm disappointed. But I shouldn't be disappointed with this member at this point of still partisanship. The question, Member, is that if it was such a good thing – you had all the stroke, quite frankly, all the authority

to make this happen. You didn't. You have a different management style. Some of the stakeholders that we've engaged even went so far as mentioning the type of mismanagement. The way that you managed your department when you were there was not all roses. You squandered a ton of cash, it was disorganized, and we're cleaning up this mess.

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

Mr. Getson: Minister Pon has engaged the stakeholders . . .

The Chair: A point of order. Hey, Mr. Getson. Mr. Getson, you're going to have to pause.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that certainly under 23(h), (i), and (j), "makes allegations against another member," Mr. Getson just clearly stated, "You squandered a ton of cash," and I think that that is clearly an allegation that has not been tested in any court of law that I know of or certainly not tested in front of this Assembly. I would ask that the member respectfully withdraw that and refrain from making such significant allegations in this place.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Schow.

Mr. Schow: Well, I appreciate the interjection, the point of order from Member Dang. I think it's ridiculous that he thinks this is a point of order. He even said that this hasn't been tested in the court of law. But to that point, it could be tested in the court of law, which makes it a matter of debate, which makes it not a point of order.

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

Okay. I appreciate the submissions by both sides. I'm not going to lie to you. I, too, raised a slight eyebrow with the allegation made by the member. You know, I'm afraid I'm going to have to rule that there is a point of order here. There are ways of saying what you need to say, Mr. Getson, and rewording it while still making your point. I'm going to ask that you apologize and withdraw that comment. You can certainly make the point without a direct accusation against the member.

Thank you.

Mr. Getson: Thank you for that, Mr. Chair. Yes, I'll withdraw the comment in that regard.

The point I was trying to make – I apologize; I'm a little punchy this morning. Again, with seniors, they're very near and dear to my heart, as is the minister trying to do the work and clean up a mess that was left behind from the previous administration. It comes down to management styles. I guess the point that I'm trying to make, Chair and to the member, is that you had tons of opportunity with an unlimited budget, so to speak, that you worked with within your parameters and you still did not get the task at hand done. So with that, can you answer the question of why you were ineffective with the budget at hand to actually execute this work when you were the minister, to do the right things for the seniors then?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Getson, I want to say to you that, you know, the recent report in the fall from the Auditor General said that \$1.6 billion was not accounted for properly by this government and also that you lost millions on the KXL pipeline. I think you need to look in the mirror if you're wanting to blame our government for that kind of – I mean, the Auditor General said it was one of the worst . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called. Mr. Schow, go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Sure. Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), using language to cause – I guess to disrupt the Legislature. "You squandered money." "Look in the mirror." If we're going to go down this road, I guess I'd say that maybe we're going to play both sides. This may be said a little more tactfully by the member who is presenting. But I still think it's a point of order if we're trying to keep some level of decorum in this place. I encourage the presenter to retract and maybe try that again.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think certainly we've seen today that the questions being asked are being framed in a particular manner that makes it difficult to answer, and I think that when we have guests or members of this committee who are presenting their bills, of which we are here to debate, a wide degree of latitude has been granted in terms of how the answers can be given. That's true whether we have had guests or members of this committee in the past. I consider this to be a point of debate, and I'd ask that you will as well.

The Chair: Well, I think I've been doing this long enough and have earned the respect of both sides that you know I will be fair, so I will rule that this is a point of order. I want to ask the member to focus on the bill. I'm going to ask all members, actually, to focus on the bill and not the partisanship. So I am going to rule that this is a point of order. I'm going to ask the member to retract and withdraw and continue on to make her final point.

Thank you.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. Mr. Chair, I retract and withdraw.

I certainly want to say that when we were a government, seniors were a very important part of the work that we did, and that is why a stand-alone office was created. We chose an expert in seniors' services, and that expert had a PhD in sociology that specialized in seniors' work. Unfortunately, the UCP government has not taken the same respect for seniors across this province in serving seniors, and certainly there's no such level of expertise in the office currently. I think we've taken a significant step backwards because of the decisions by the UCP government.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Member Dach, go ahead, please.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Member Sigurdson, for bringing this important issue forward. Now, I'd like to bring the focus back to the people that we are here to serve, primarily that being our senior population here in Alberta. I know, Member Sigurdson, you have elderly parents. I have an elderly mother that I'm caring for as well. It's those concerns that shape my feelings around the Seniors Advocate office and creating an independent body.

I know that when you were the Minister of Seniors and Housing, there was an advocate that assisted. It wasn't an independent office at that time, but certainly I wanted to get an idea of how that experience affected your work during your time as minister, that led you to know that, ultimately, your goal was to create an independent office at the Legislature to serve and advocate for seniors. If you could just let us know a little bit about how having at least the advocate for seniors led you to continue thinking that the ultimate goal should be having an independent officer.

Ms Sigurdson: Right. Certainly, even with the stand-alone office of the Seniors Advocate dedicated to supporting seniors across our province, I met with her on a regular basis. Of course, she did her reports that had specifics about her individual work with seniors, helping them overcome barriers in our public system and putting forward recommendations that we really considered when we were putting forward our business plans. She certainly made me a better minister, I must say. Her expertise taught me things that I didn't know before in this area. I think an independent advocate – I guess the model that I'm using oftentimes when I'm speaking and certainly in drafting this legislation is the B.C. model, where they have an independent advocate, and they have had a much better response in terms of COVID. The advocate has done reviews of outbreaks in continuing care centres, and the government has followed the recommendations. That has made a significant difference for B.C. seniors. So I think that Alberta: we should step up also and do that.

You know, it's very sad. I mean, I have both reports here of the previous advocate, and the Seniors Advocate report gives detailed information about the types of challenges seniors are experiencing in our province plus recommendations for larger systemic change. This advocate's report, the Health Advocate, that the government has indicated the Seniors Advocate is also serving, has nothing about that. There are no recommendations. There's no detail about the cases. Each time I ask Minister Pon or Minister Shandro about, you know, what advice they're getting, neither of them will answer my questions. So I really question the efficacy of this advocate, and I do commend and say that this legislation is needed in Alberta so that we can support seniors.

The Chair: All right. Mr. Dach, a quick follow-up, please.

Mr. Dach: Yeah, a quick follow-up. I know, Member Sigurdson, that in the last year or so with the pandemic right across the country as well as, of course, in Alberta, as you mentioned in your preamble, we've seen very large deficiencies in our long-term care centres and in the standard of care that we've offered our seniors for many years in our various lodges and housing and accommodation for seniors and has been particularly highlighted by the COVID crisis. I think that perhaps right across the country but also, of course, in Alberta, as you are making us well aware, this perhaps should be used as a launching point to really tackle these long-term systemic problems, as you recently alluded to in your comments.

9:30

Could you talk a little bit about some of these long-term systemic problems that a Seniors Advocate would be able to ensure didn't leave the public's top-of-mind awareness and ensure that government fulfilled its responsibility to meet our seniors' needs right where they are?

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. Thank you so much for the question. I'll just give a quick example of what the B.C. advocate did during the pandemic. One of the recommendations she put forward was rapid testing, which made a big difference in their continuing care facilities. And when she went public as an independent officer – she can do that; she doesn't have to speak through a minister who may vet what she is saying – the government did follow her expertise, and that made a significant difference in continuing care facilities.

I mean, having another voice, a champion for seniors in our province, I think, is so important. We know that there are significant issues in continuing care in terms of staffing. You know, certainly, bringing her expertise into how a workforce strategy, for example, could have been put in place during the pandemic – I think we can frankly say that many continuing care facilities were overwhelmed

because their staff became sick. Infection rates were extremely high. If there could have been some leadership and direction by an advocate to support the government, which, again, was happening in B.C. – so just in terms of brevity that's another example of something an advocate could do.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.
Member R.J. Sigurdson, go ahead, please.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Ms Sigurdson, for your presentation and also bringing this to the table. I can echo a lot of the comments about the fact that, you know, it's really important that we continue to work on the care and supports for our seniors, the people that have built this province and made it what it is today. We should always be focused on that. They were the ones that laid the foundation to this province that we live in.

As a business owner and as a first-time MLA I'm going to try to ask some questions, hopefully, that you can clarify on. I know that we merged – and when I was in government, sometimes I merged departments, too, and I found them more effective – the Seniors Advocate and Health Advocate, and in a lot of ways I kind of look at this and think that maybe this merger could increase the co-ordination as it created kind of a single source of information for seniors. Even with that, we took as a government most of the experienced staff at the office of the Seniors Advocate over to this department to advocate on seniors' behalf. So the legislative authority of the office really didn't change. The Health Advocate has the same authority as your Seniors Advocate did when you were in in its time.

I'm a little concerned. I need some details, I guess. I'm just concerned that maybe there could be some confusion, and now if advocates think they need to go get support, there could be delays. Are we creating bureaucracy that's just going to confuse our seniors and not provide them a synchronous or an easy path to the support that they're looking for?

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead. You can answer the question.
Thank you.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Well, I mean, the sad piece of this is that, yes, that was what we understood, that it was going to be amalgamated, you know, the Seniors Advocate and the Health Advocate, so the same supports would be available for seniors, but unfortunately that just hasn't been what's gone on. We know that actually only 30 per cent of concerns brought forward by seniors have to do with health at all. There is no information about what concerns are being brought forward.

As I said, I have the most recent report right in front of me, and there are no recommendations to the minister regarding it. There's been no public communication at all regarding, you know, supports for seniors during a pandemic. I mean, this office, even if they are to be responsible for seniors, they've been silent on so many fronts, and there's been no real advocacy at all. That's a significant missing. That was a huge piece for the previous Seniors Advocate. This is why I'm calling for an independent advocate, because we're not getting that service now.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Member. Time has expired. We thank you for your presentation today.

We will now move on to the technical briefings by the ministries of Health and Seniors and Housing, so the committee members will now hear technical briefings from the ministries of Health and Seniors and Housing. The representative from Health is Mr. Evan Romanow, Assistant Deputy Minister of health service delivery, and the officials from Seniors and Housing are Ms Suzanne

Anselmo, Assistant Deputy Minister, seniors and strategic services, and Ms Roxanne Dube Coelho, executive adviser, strategic services.

The procedure is for each ministry to present and respond to questions individually. We're going to have Mr. Romanow. He's going to give his five-minute presentation, followed by 20 minutes of questions and answers from the committee members. Then we will move on to officials from Seniors and Housing.

Mr. Romanow, you are online and ready to go? Thank you, sir. You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Thank you.

Mr. Romanow: Thank you, Chair. As noted, my name is Evan Romanow. I'm the ADM for health service delivery in Alberta Health. I'm pleased to be here this morning to provide a verbal presentation on Bill 215, the Seniors Advocate Act, and certainly to take any questions about the bill or implications for health operations.

My division is responsible for the development and implementation of policy, legislation, and standards for addiction and mental health, emergency health services, and continuing care. In addition, we maintain a strong and close relationship with the office of the Alberta Health Advocate. Currently the office of the Alberta Health Advocate, or the OAHA, includes the Health Advocate and the Mental Health Patient Advocate. The office supports Albertans, regardless of age, in resolving their health-related concerns by helping them navigate health care systems, referring individuals to the appropriate complaints resolution services, providing information about the Alberta Health charter, requesting the inspection of provincial health facilities, and addressing patients' issues and concerns in relation to the Mental Health Act.

The OAHA falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Health, and in January 2020, as was noted, the former office of the Seniors Advocate was transitioned into the OAHA. This change reflected the fact that many of the issues that were brought to the attention of the Seniors Advocate were health related. Seniors who contact the Health Advocate's office receive information and referrals to needed supports and services. Staff connect seniors directly to other departments across government or find information as requested. What we found is having the OAHA embedded in the Ministry of Health and reporting to the minister allows for easier access to information within the health care system as the OAHA is a custodian of health information under the Health Information Act. In the last fiscal year the OAHA opened nearly 2,500 cases, and during the first half of the pandemic they experienced a 30 per cent increase in cases, largely related to seniors' concerns.

As it relates to the proposed act, a number of the provisions and responsibilities are already outlined under the current office of the Alberta Health Advocate. Section 2 of Bill 215 outlines the existing duties and activities of the current advocate. Throughout the Alberta Health Act and the Health Advocate regulation the OAHA has the authority to review complaints, issue reports, and provide wayfinding services to Albertans for health-related programs and resources. The OAHA does not have explicit authority in legislation to conduct reviews on non health-related issues. However, they assist individuals in determining the appropriate resolution mechanisms through which they can have their concerns addressed.

The OAHA serves all Albertans of any age, but a large proportion of their clients who seek services are seniors, and therefore much of the work of the office focuses on seniors' health. Under the Alberta Health Act and Health Advocate regulation the Health

Advocate has the authority to conduct a review if they are of the belief that someone has contravened the Health charter. This authority allows the Health Advocate to review complex systems within the health ecosystem and provide recommendations to the minister on improvements.

Additionally, the OAHA must report annually to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The most recent annual report of the OAHA was tabled last November by Minister Shandro.

9:40

There are a number of ways that Alberta Health is held accountable through the Legislature. Notably, the office of the Auditor General conducts multiple reviews of issues in the health sector. As an example, the OAG is in progress of reviewing the provincial continuing care COVID-19 response.

Related to the pandemic the OAHA has also worked very closely within Alberta Health, AHS, and with regulators to ensure the experience of Albertans, including seniors, has been reflected in both policy and development and operations throughout the COVID response. For example, early in the pandemic the OAHA identified that Albertans were calling many different offices and did not have information about who to contact within the health complaints resolution landscape. The OAHA facilitated discussions, and arrangements were made for efficient sharing of information between offices.

As another example, following the receipt of many concerns from patients, residents, and family members about restrictive visitation policies in the early months of the pandemic, the OAHA advocated to Alberta Health to change the visitation policy.

That concludes my intro remarks, and I would be happy to take any questions you may have.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much, sir, for your presentation.

We will now go to members from our committee. We have government member Glasgo. Go ahead, please, first for a quick question and follow-up, please.

Ms Glasgo: Mr. Chair, I'm not on the list.

The Chair: Oh, I apologize. Sorry. It was R.J. Sigurdson. My apologies. R.J. Sigurdson for a question and follow-up, followed by Member Irwin.

Mr. Sigurdson: Sorry. Thank you for your presentation. I guess I will just, you know, ask a simple question. Just on the thread that I was asking a little bit before, when you look at what's happened since January 2020 and the combining of the departments to make it a little bit more efficient and the co-ordination and co-operation that's happened there, I mean, really, we've taken the previous government's department and their senior advocates and officials and brought them over to be able to increase the efficiency to be able to co-ordinate with Health and health-related matters for our seniors. We've really taken the previous government's design and brought it over to improve it for seniors and their ability to advocate. Can you speak about how that has helped in the response since January to be able to deal with seniors' issues and the efficiency with that to be able to, you know, respond quicker and provide a single source for people to come to be able to deal with their issues as seniors in our province?

The Chair: Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Romanow: Thank you. I had the benefit of previously working – and my colleague from Seniors and Housing will speak more

directly, but I was previously the ADM of senior services and seniors' housing, so I had the opportunity to work directly with the Seniors Advocate as well as in the current form. From our experience, there were a number of questions that were going from Albertans to both offices previously instead of more to a directed, consolidated Health Advocate's office, so the streamlining of access points even into advocates has been enhanced, from our experience, with this integrated office.

I think, to your questions related to the COVID experience, that was all the more important when decisions were happening in real time. I referenced a couple of the immediate examples about visitation policies. For example, decisions, as we know, were changing by the day or the week throughout COVID, and having an embedded individual and strong team within the Health Advocate's office was key to hearing from the front lines what Albertans were saying and to inform decision-making with Dr. Hinshaw and the others within our health team to make sure that we were, again, in a very real time able to be responsive to needs of Albertans.

The Chair: Do you have a quick follow-up, Mr. Sigurdson?

Mr. Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you, Chair, and thank you again for that answer. I guess when we're looking at that, you know, we continue to have an entire department for Seniors and Housing. You've just spoken to the fact that this is more just a consolidation, bringing it together for efficiency, and I know our government is spending more now than we ever had, including an additional \$260 million that's going to go into continuing care service for seniors.

Maybe if you could just speak a little bit of how it is formed right now and throughout this pandemic how you've been able to respond and change services, like you said, and how the fluidity in nature and that decrease in bureaucracy has helped initiate a faster and quicker response for seniors throughout the province.

Mr. Romanow: Thank you. Some of the areas that I would highlight: the Health Advocate's office is closely involved, highlighted some of the areas with the COVID response. But looking at the broader system that is evolving based on the COVID experience to support seniors – the facility-based continuing care review, for example – there's a home-care redesign initiative looking at addictions and mental health and council recommendations to enhance that system. The Health Advocate's office and the Health Advocate have been directly involved in all of that work to, again, in a real-time way inform the thinking of that review to be reflecting what they are hearing from Albertans of all ages. But, again, many seniors do connect in with that office to inform the thinking in those significant and what will be transformative policies in those specific areas, again largely related to continuing care.

So there's an opportunity to help inform policy as it's being developed and to be implemented in quite short order in those areas, and we found it quite helpful, actually, having the advocate's office involved in those planning processes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Irwin, go ahead, please.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to dig in a little bit more on something that was kind of alluded to in your comments. When the Seniors Advocate was a position, what percentage of the concerns were health related? I ask this because, you know, we've heard that Member Sigurdson has heard from multiple organizations with tens of thousands of members who've really outlined that the needs of seniors are broad and that they're not as narrow as just health. Could you elaborate a bit on that?

Mr. Romanow: My colleague coming from the seniors ministry, where that was tracked, Suzanne Anselmo, will be able to provide some more specific details on that side. The challenge, from my perspective, to directly be able to answer that is because, for awareness, the office of the Alberta Health Advocate doesn't track specifically by age; it's tracked based on the broader concerns of all Albertans. My understanding was that about 34 per cent of the calls were seniors related and on the outreach and engagement, but again, for many of them, our experience was either going to both offices previously or largely related, again, to issues within the health system. So it has been able to be streamlined in that regard.

The Chair: Thank you.

A follow-up, Member Irwin? Go ahead.

Member Irwin: Okay. Well, I guess I'd like to know: what public recommendations has the Health Advocate made specifically related to seniors' services? Has she said anything publicly about how seniors' services – not health but seniors' services in particular – need to be addressed? I would just like to know what she's done specifically in this regard, what she's recommended.

Mr. Romanow: As mentioned, the Health Advocate is closely involved in all of the work with the facility-based continuing care redesign, the home-care redesign initiatives, and is working directly to provide advice directly into those processes. As well – and it's outlined in regulation – there is the reporting to the Legislature, and we have referenced that. MLA Sigurdson referenced the report that has been outlined there. But I think that there's a lot more. What we found is real-time opportunities for sharing advice to the minister, the minister's office, and certainly our team.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Member Rutherford. Go ahead, please, sir.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the presentations today. It's much appreciated. I think I share the sentiment of everybody on this committee that we want what is best for our seniors and to make sure that they are well looked after and to make sure their concerns are heard. I wanted to touch on some of the implications where the current set-up for a Seniors Advocate is falling short and try to get a sense from the department, I guess, of the synergies that exist when a senior might have to potentially reach out to multiple different people in order to get help as opposed to having one source from which to obtain information. Really, is that sort of diminishing in any way the quality of the services that a senior is receiving?

You know, the Health Advocate and the mental health advocate and the Seniors Advocate coming together to be able to provide advice on a particular direction: I guess, from your perspective within the department, pretty simply, has this diminished in any way the quality of support available for seniors?

9:50

Mr. Romanow: Thank you, MLA Rutherford, for the question. I would point to a couple of the processes that are strongly in place, where the Health Advocate is able to do some of that monitoring and collecting of information, the types of issues and concerns that are raised. I would point to the Health Advocate regulation, for example. The record of complaints and reviews: the Health Advocate maintains records relating to complaints and reviews conducted.

The OAHA has a confidential database, as mentioned. They do have access through the Health Information Act to confidential client information. Then it, really, reports on data collected,

identifies trends, and issues are provided to the minister on a monthly basis. Again, that's on a confidential basis with the sensitive information that they collect, so it is having those regular report-ins. There are opportunities and requirements in regulation and within, again, both the Health Advocate regulation and the Alberta Health Act, that have their requirements for them to provide those actions.

Perhaps, additionally, I'd just point to the strong role that I think, again, is in regulation. There's a referral of clients that takes place. They provide some of the opportunities for coaching and self-advocacy within the system to individuals, and a lot of those resources are provided directly to individual seniors as well as the consolidation of those concerns reported to the minister.

The Chair: Okay. A follow-up, Member Rutherford?

Mr. Rutherford: Yeah. I just want to get a sense of sort of before and after the recent change around the advocate on what kind of topics are coming in to be discussed. I think some of the questions earlier alluded to this, but I just want to make sure that folks watching this can appreciate the concerns they have and that the support they are looking for is still available. I noted that I don't really have an answer as to why a Seniors Advocate or an independent office wasn't created under the NDP other than that there just wasn't time, so I guess it wasn't a priority.

I want to be able to make sure, though, that folks watching this today understand that seniors still have the ability to seek help and that by combining these resources together, a senior would have more of a one-stop shop for support more broadly as opposed to different groups working in silos. Was that an issue? Are there too many groups working in silos, not communicating with one another? Does having independent groups that aren't combined for seniors cause an issue where they just might not reach out to multiple different groups to seek help?

Mr. Romanow: Thank you. Probably on two levels I could respond. I think that government and certainly our Health ministry, working with other government departments, have really identified a lot of the issues that seniors have been raising and are taking action in those areas, again, notable ones related to seniors as there have been calls, and these are platform commitments. I know that our minister has directed action and other ministers have, again, related to the facility-based continuing care review, related to home-care redesign, related to addictions and mental health, which are some of the leading issues and concerns that seniors have raised.

There are significant policy processes under way to look at enhancements, and I think the opportunity we have seen is for more streamlined connectivity with the Health Advocate's office into those processes, again, in more real time to feed in what they're hearing and seeing as concerns but, then, much more directly.

The other part of your question, about what those actual processes are that are in place to respond to individual seniors: again, we have seen that it's been easier for individuals to access and reach in to government with their concerns and to seek that information and advice. A lot of times one of the greatest challenges, certainly in my experience, is that it's a question of just accessing the right information and navigating the system.

My colleague in Seniors and Housing can speak more about what is done to support the information sharing with community- and seniors-serving organizations to really strengthen on that level, to get the right information in the hands of individuals so that it doesn't get to the point of needing to even reach in with a complaint to an advocate's office. I think that on both those levels we have

streamlined activities with the current structure relative to the structure with multiple advocate offices.

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Dang, go ahead, please, sir.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the presentation. I guess I have a question around some of the work that the advocate does. I mean, obviously, if we look at other jurisdictions like the B.C. Seniors Advocate, for example, they've made public recommendations and conducted reviews of homes independently. Could the current Health Advocate do that type of work without sign-off from the Health minister? Is there a requirement that the work of the Health Advocate be approved by the Health minister in that way?

Mr. Romanow: My colleague from Seniors and Housing can reinforce, but the B.C. advocate also reports in to the minister, just as in the current structure. There certainly is an opportunity to share advice and recommendations in to the minister, kind of on a broader systems level, where I think part of your question was, some of the opportunities to directly engage and provide information out to individuals and organizations. I think the Health Advocate's office has participated in a number of different tables. They've been involved, for instance, in the neurological rehabilitation and vision COVID task force, sharing information, resources, and planning on the COVID response. They've been involved with Dementia Network Calgary and a number of organizations within Calgary, more as a region, dealing with some issues related to COVID, looking at dementia care.

They've been also, I think, very importantly, connected in with work that our Department of Health has been leading to support, connected with different reviews and processes under way, to enhance existing policies and structures but also sharing that information right back out with community organizations. There are a number of those types of examples that could be highlighted. But I don't think there's anything that precludes the advocate from engaging, again, first and foremost, with Albertans of all ages but also with organizations in addition to providing advice to the minister.

The Chair: A follow-up, Mr. Dang?

Mr. Dang: Thank you. I guess my question is really around the independence of reporting of the Health Advocate. In terms of the Health Advocate's recommendations and as the advocate, as you mentioned, does report to the minister here under those restrictions, do you feel that the recommendations that are reported publicly by the minister are identical to what the Health Advocate reports to the minister, or are they adjusted by the minister before they are released publicly? Is there a difference functionally between the reporting to the minister or to the public? For example, has the Health Advocate made a report on the residents who have died from COVID in continuing care, and could that report be made public without approval from the minister?

Mr. Romanow: Again, like in the B.C. environment, there is still the reporting in to the minister. I did highlight, for example, on the continuing care COVID-19 response that the office of the Auditor General has initiated work in those regards, the specific example of COVID and continuing care environments and the work and strong actions under way and looking at lessons and opportunities to learn from this current experience.

There are certainly guidelines and responsibilities that are captured under the Health Advocate regulation and the Alberta

Health Act that do have that requirement. It is the duty and responsibility of the Health Advocate to be able to make those recommendations and provide that advice based on the complaints. They are able to undertake exploration investigations as systems may present issues or challenges. Again, there is an opportunity to go and act based on the issues and concerns that are raised without having to do that check-in on individual cases with the minister, for example. There is clear outline of responsibility and duties that the Health Advocate does have in those spaces to ensure that they are acting on the issues and concerns raised by Albertans.

10:00

The Chair: All right. Mr. Amery, you should be able to get one question in there.

Mr. Amery: Perfect. Good morning to all of you, and thank you to the member for bringing this very important issue. I think I echo the sentiment of all my colleagues when I say that our seniors are truly the backbone of this province. I will be brief. You had mentioned, sir, that some of the benefits that you had spoken about were the streamlined processes of the current advocate. Certainly, it appears as though the existing process is effective and efficient. You also mentioned, though, that a lot of the process involves accessing and navigating the system properly, and I'm curious about that. If you could comment a little bit about that and tell us whether or not you have any details to share about how often or how many times over the past few years the advocate's office has been contacted. Has this increased, in your view, over the course of the pandemic? Have we seen a greater request for assistance throughout the pandemic? I'm just going to throw it all in there because I think we're pressed for time here. Does the advocate's office record the outcome of each of these requests? What percentage of the requests are completed? And what type of reporting do you have based on the type of information that people are seeking or assistance that they're seeking as opposed to how often their inquiries are successfully completed?

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Time has expired. But, Mr. Romanow, you may finish answering the question.

Thank you.

Mr. Romanow: Great. Thank you very much. Certainly, a few questions that were there, and I'll try to answer a number of them. On the broader level about the increases and the number of calls that have been received and the increase with COVID, we have seen that in the last fiscal year, the OAHA opened nearly 2,500 case files. Yes, there was a significant increase, about 30 per cent of cases during the first half of the pandemic. Certainly, the experience and advice from the Health Advocate's office has been that a number of those were related to concerns with probably seniors, their caregivers, and families related to seniors' issues, concerns. Again, visitation was a significant one.

With respect to the action on those types of calls the annual report that is provided by the office of the Health Advocate does identify the number of new files that they have, the number of issues that were raised.

With respect to the follow-up and completion of those individual pieces we would need to confirm through that reporting process specifically what we'll be seeing in the next report in that regard that will be reported on in the COVID context, that Albertans are reaching out for that office.

But, yes, I think we have seen that having that office and that team very closely connected within the health system is able to

much more directly and in a pretty streamlined way in real time get access to the right information. Again, we've heard largely from senior-serving organizations and many seniors themselves lots of questions and concerns. The telephone town halls that Dr. Hinshaw and ministers of both Health and seniors have had have been some of the types of tools where we've been able to broadcast and share the issues and concerns that have been raised and flagged through our Health Advocate's office, as an example, so we're able to respond in fairly broad ways. That's just one of the types of examples under way to make sure the right information is getting into the hands of Albertans.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, sir. Thank you very much for your presentation. Thank you for answering questions from our committee members. Thank you for being here today.

Next we're going to move on to our presentation by the Ministry of Seniors and Housing: Ms Suzanne Anselmo, assistant deputy minister, seniors and strategic services; and Ms Roxanne Dube Coelho, executive adviser, strategic services. The ladies are online. Fantastic. You'll have up to five minutes, followed by up to 20 minutes of questions from committee members. So the floor is yours. Thank you for being here.

Ms Anselmo: Thank you, Chair. As the chair mentioned, my name is Suzanne Anselmo. I'm assistant deputy minister in the Ministry of Seniors and Housing. I'm pleased to be here to provide a technical briefing regarding Bill 215, the Seniors Advocate Act. I would like to start with a jurisdictional comparison. Three provinces have a Seniors Advocate office: British Columbia, Newfoundland, and New Brunswick. As my colleague noted, the Seniors Advocate in British Columbia reports to the Minister of Health. Only Newfoundland has a Seniors Advocate that reports to the Legislature.

Jurisdictions without stand-alone advocates manage seniors-related issues through a number of mechanisms. Ontario, for example, has several umbrella organizations whose networks are focused on improving access and co-ordination of support services for seniors and care providers. They work on the quality of life for seniors through educational programs, research, information, referrals, counselling, and outreach support as well as liaise with the provincial government. The majority of provinces have 211 information lines for individuals to access information on government and community support programs. In addition, most provinces have various forms of appeal panels and ombudsmen offices.

Here in Alberta a number of organizations work to address seniors' primary concerns, including health and care support, income and financial supports, house and home supports, social supports, and elder abuse. There are many resources available to support seniors' needs across government and through civil society organizations. These include legislation such as the Protection for Persons in Care Act and offices such as the office of the public guardian and trustee and the Alberta Health Advocate. Alberta Supports has many community offices, helplines, and online supports to assist callers, regardless of age, with access to programs and community services for a variety of topics, including financial assistance and seniors' programs. Family and community support services across the province provide preventative social programs and services, including those for seniors. Approximately 400 seniors' centres across the province provide a range of services from social activities, information referral, health and social supports, housing, and wellness programs. Seniors and Housing is regularly in contact with many of these organizations and their umbrella associations.

Some seniors and their families express difficulty in getting the help they need or having someone to advocate on their behalf. A number of mechanisms are available to advocate for seniors-related issues, to inform government policy and program development. These include appeal processes, citizens' appeals panels for Albertans who disagree with a decision made by government regarding a government program, and a number of advisory councils, panels, and committees that ensure Albertans have their needs reflected in planning and decisions. For example, the minister has a Minister of Seniors and Housing advisory committee for seniors. Seniors and Housing engages with several community organizations that represent and advocate on the needs and interests of seniors such as the Alberta Association of Seniors Centres, Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council, and Alberta Council on Aging. The point here is that the evidence shows us that there are a number of pathways of advocacy for Alberta's senior citizens.

In terms of the bill components you will see that the proposed roles and responsibilities of the Seniors Advocate in Bill 215 align with other advocates. The review of powers outlined in the bill are the same as the Child and Youth Advocate. Specifically, in conducting a review under section 3, the advocate has all the powers, privileges, and immunities of a commissioner under the Public Inquiries Act. This would allow the power to compel witnesses and provide evidence, and this is an important piece in Bill 215.

There are financial implications should Bill 215 be passed into law. There will be an investment required to establish a new office, including resources and FTEs to address the functions of the office, including those powers to investigate. If an office is in structure and size similar to the Child and Youth Advocate office in Alberta, just for comparison sake, the office of the Child and Youth Advocate serves approximately 10,700 children involved in the child intervention system with an annual budget of just under \$15 million. The B.C. Seniors Advocate budget . . .

10:10

The Chair: Assistant Deputy Minister, I'll let you finish your final thought. Your time has expired, but if you'd like to finish your final thought.

Thank you.

Ms Anselmo: Thank you, Chair. Just one quick point. The B.C. Seniors Advocate budget was approximately \$2.5 million, and the former office of the Seniors Advocate budget was just under \$1 million.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will now go into a series of questions from our committee members. We have Member Glasgo.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Chair, a point of clarification.

The Chair: Okay. Before we start the clock, Mr. Schow, you have a point of clarification you'd like to make?

Mr. Schow: Sure. This is actually a question maybe to be directed at Trafton, the Parliamentary Counsel. The person who just presented here – I appreciate the presentation – mentioned that there's a financial investment required if this bill is passed. Private members' bills are not able to spend money. Based on your opinion of whatever advice you can give the committee, is this bill in order if it is required to spend money?

The Chair: You can make an attempt to answer it. It's certainly something that can be taken offline.

Mr. Koenig: Yeah, I can just provide a few brief comments. It's not up to me whether the bill would be in order. But what I can say just off the top of my head, without doing any research, is that it is my understanding that private members' bills have in the past proposed creating independent officers of the Legislature, so I don't believe this is unusual in that respect. But I can't provide much more comment than that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Okay. We'll start the clock here, and we'll go to Member Glasgo for a question and answer, please.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to apologize in advance. My video is not able to work. I'm working on some very limited bandwidth this morning. My apartment Internet is not functional.

Ms Assistant Deputy Minister, I was wondering if you could elaborate on the costs associated with establishing the office of the Seniors Advocate should this bill pass. It was my understanding as well that private members' bills were not able to be money bills, so to speak, so I'm just kind of curious as to what this would cost if you could more flesh out those details: FTE costs, including the advocate itself, extra support services.

To me, based on your presentation and presentations from presenters past, it would appear that we have a very comprehensive network for seniors' advocacy in Alberta. I'm very proud of that given that, of course, our seniors are so important to our communities. I know just from personal experience how important it is to have somebody to advocate for those who can't advocate for themselves as they get to an older age or need more assistance, with the world changing and, you know, different resources being available.

I'm just curious if you could elaborate on those costs for the committee. I'm not asking in a positive or negative way. I'm just curious as to what those costs would look like from the department side of things.

Thank you.

Ms Anselmo: Thank you very much for the question. It's very difficult to articulate with any certainty what the costs would be to establish an independent Seniors Advocate. The purpose of my presentation was just to provide the committee with information from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, which does have the powers to bring forth witnesses to provide evidence. Bill 215 mirrors the Child and Youth Advocate bill, so just for purposes of comparison I thought it best to let the committee know that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, which serves approximately 10,700 children, does have an annual budget of \$15 million. I also provided markers for this committee to consider, that the B.C. Seniors Advocate budget for 2019-20 was approximately \$2.5 million and that the former office of the Seniors Advocate budget was just under \$1 million. I hope these points of comparison provide information for the committee as they deliberate on this bill.

The Chair: Okay. Member Glasgo, do you have a follow-up?

Ms Glasgo: I do not, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for that, Ms Assistant Deputy Minister.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Nielsen. Go ahead.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. One of the questions that I don't feel has been answered yet in this committee is around what the advocate can and cannot do right now. I will try to be very, very pointed. If the advocate disagrees with the minister, can the advocate go to the media with this opinion without approval from the minister?

The Chair: Okay. That's a question to one of our guests.

Ms Anselmo: Thank you for the question. I would actually ask to refer this question to my colleague in the Ministry of Health as the Health Advocate reports to the Minister of Health.

The Chair: Yeah. Mr. Romanow, are you still online? You certainly are welcome to answer that question for our committee member if you could.

Mr. Romanow: Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you. There are a number of areas where there is a direct comparison with the way that advice is able to be provided, where action is able to be taken with individual cases and referrals. The specific example of going to speak on their own volition to media: that is not something that is explicitly outlined as being something that is within their mandate in regulation to do, to have that public role, but certainly with the action on behalf of all Albertans, including seniors, where they have raised issues or concerns, all of those functions for action and follow-up, there is alignment and clear outline in legislation and regulation to carry on work on the behalf of Albertans.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen, for a follow-up, please.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Just a quick follow-up, then. In the case of this bill, we've heard about the services that they can interact with and whatnot. Would it be prudent for the committee to hear from those seniors that are actually trying to access those services and how they are working for them?

The Chair: Whatever guest would like to respond to that question. Are we deferring to Mr. Romanow? No?

Ms Anselmo: Actually, no. Thank you for that. This is Suzanne Anselmo. In my role as assistant deputy minister to this committee I'm here to provide the technical briefing from a public servant perspective. I do understand that the standing committee does have the ability to speak to stakeholders, and I leave that decision to the knowledge and wisdom of the committee.

Mr. Romanow: Chair, I could perhaps add a little more . . .

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Romanow: . . . on, I think, some of the uniqueness. As my ADM colleague outlined, unlike the Child and Youth Advocate, that in many cases acts on behalf of minors, individuals that are wards of the state, the Health Advocate plays more of a role as that internal advocate to outline where there are issues and concerns but perhaps, again, for consideration of the committee, does not need to fill that same legal role as they would need to for a minor or a youth within the system otherwise. So there are some differences with respect to that advocacy. The role that there would be a platform for Albertans to speak up: that's perhaps beyond the scope of the bill presented.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

I don't have anybody on the list, but are there any government members that have a question?

How about any opposition members?

Mr. Dach: Dach here.

The Chair: Oh, I heard a voice.

Mr. Dach: Yeah. I'm just wondering, Mr. Chair, if the Health Advocate has ever made any independent reports to the public via the media and if that, in fact, is something that historically has been allowed, and if so, can you recite an example, please?

Mr. Romanow: In the context related to seniors, again, this is a newer specific area of focus within the Health Advocate's office. Specifically with seniors, if you're asking, there's not an example I can point to in the last year where there has been that independent advice. Again, there is a report that is presented to the Legislature, that was by Minister Shandro in November of this past year, but there certainly is an ongoing role where there can be discussion about issues about what we are hearing.

10:20

Mr. Dach: But that wasn't quite what I was asking, sir. What I was asking was: given that now the roles have been combined, that Seniors has been rolled into Health, into one streamline, as you say, since they're one organization, I'm just wondering. Historically, before this rolling together took place, has the Health component had the ability to make commentary or bring forth issues to the media publicly without rebuke from the ministry? Would they be allowed to do this? Now that we've got Seniors added into it, that would obviously be a similar responsibility or a similar authority that would be given to Seniors. Has historically Health, before Seniors was added in, been able to go ahead and make representations to the media, bringing forward issues of concern?

The Chair: Mr. Dach, if you can just help me out here. You seem like you've asked a question in regard to Health. Can you just help me tie this in to this bill and the Seniors Advocate role?

Mr. Dach: Certainly.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dach: What I was trying to get to, Mr. Chair, was that the Seniors Advocate has been rolled into Health, so we've got an advocacy organization for Seniors and Health now. I'm just wondering: historically, before that rolling together took place, was that organization able to bring forward issues of concern to the public, and would now that authority be granted, if indeed that was the case, to that organization if indeed they wanted to publicize an issue of concern with respect to Seniors?

The Chair: It looks like we've got two people who want to answer here. How about we go to Ms Anselmo, and then we'll go to Mr. Romanow.

Ms Anselmo: Thank you, Chair. In answer to your question, I would like to just point to the history of the Seniors Advocate office in Alberta. As many of you may remember, in November 2013, as part of the implementation of the Alberta Health Act, the former Progressive Conservative government announced the creation of the Health and Seniors Advocate office. The offices opened in 2014, and as things developed and matured with regard to the offices, there was a standing practice, both through legislation and practice, that the advocates report to the minister. That is a historical view of how advocacy in this province has developed over time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Romanow, go ahead, please.

Mr. Romanow: Thank you. I appreciate the clarification of the question, MLA Dach. Certainly, the advocate is able to and actively does engage with Albertans but also with community organizations and, more broadly, publicly. But I think what the approach that the current structure and composition drive towards is, really, taking aggressive action from within the system as opposed to needing to act from outside, both reporting in to the minister as outlined in regulation and with requirements to do so as well as to the Legislature but also very directly working and in real time being able to support issues that individuals have from within the system, to really be able to advocate and drive action on individual cases, again very much from being embedded within the Health team and in the broader health environment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dach, do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Dach: I'll say that they are anemic compared to what an independent officer would be.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Was that a statement?

Mr. Dach: I'm asking if Mr. Romanow believes that that would be making the Seniors Advocate compared to an independent officer rather anemic in that they have to work internally rather than have voice publicly.

Mr. Romanow: What I would say is that in my observation and direct experience on the types of individual issues and cases that have been brought forward, there is a strong advocacy, internal advocacy, mechanism that is in place for Albertans. Hard to comment on the anemic side, about what would specifically be lacking if there is not that direct ability, as referenced, to go to media, but in terms of actually getting results and outcomes for individuals and driving those with the key players across government and within the health system, that's where the action is really needed for the direct case file or sharing of advice and looking at some of the systemic issues to the minister very directly. Working from within, in my experience, we've seen very strong outcomes and deliverables for Albertans in those regards.

Mr. Dach: I find that action is, obviously, more heeded by the government when the public is behind it.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Are there any other questions from our committee members?

Hearing and seeing none, okay. Thank you very much. I'd like to thank all of our guests for joining us here today. I very much appreciated the presentations. Mr. Romanow, thank you for standing by. As well, Ms Anselmo, thank you very much, and, Ms Dube Coelho, thank you very much for being here as well.

With that, committee members, we do have quite a few more things to do. I'm going to suggest that we take a 10-minute break at this time, and then we will return. We'll set the clock here for 10 minutes. Thank you very much. We shall return.

[The committee adjourned from 10:26 a.m. to 10:36 a.m.]

The Chair: All right. Thank you. Welcome back.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we're going to go to decisions on the review of Bill 215. Hon. members, having heard the presentations, the committee is now ready to decide how to conduct its review of Bill 215. In accordance with our previously approved process, the committee may choose to invite additional feedback from up to six stakeholders, three from each caucus. Alternatively, the committee may also choose to expedite this

review and proceed to deliberations. Does anyone have any thoughts on this? We have a list that's already started. Mr. Nielsen, you're first up on the list.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I must say that over the last six years I've had the incredible honour to represent the seniors that call Edmonton-Decore home, the facilities that are located there, and all of the seniors that come in from the surrounding communities into Edmonton-Decore through the North Edmonton Seniors Association. What an incredibly humble feeling it is to walk into one of those events. You know, you're actually stressed about trying to get around the room to everybody because it seems like every second person you're stopping wants to hug you. It's just absolutely amazing. Needless to say, I've spent a considerable amount of time with my seniors, listening to their stories, the wisdom that they have, and, more importantly, the history that they are able to impart on us about what has come before and how things are affecting them now. When I look at this bill, I know for certain that it reflects a desire within that community to have something like this. I've heard it very, very clear.

I can certainly appreciate if there happen to be maybe some disagreements about how best to deliver those things to our seniors. I guess, at the end of the day, when it comes to the seniors, how it gets delivered, what's working, what's not, the best individuals to answer those questions are the ones that are receiving those services. So I think that, with that, Mr. Chair, I will put forward a motion that the committee invite stakeholders, and I would love to discuss the topic more.

The Chair: Okay. We'll open up the floor to some questions, but I know the motion you would like to put forward, Mr. Nielsen, would be that the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills invite up to six stakeholders, three proposed by the government caucus and three proposed by the Official Opposition, to make presentations regarding Bill 215, Seniors Advocate Act, at an upcoming meeting and provide stakeholders lists to the chair by noon on Wednesday, April 21, 2021. Does that sound about right?

Mr. Nielsen: That was absolutely exactly what I thought.

The Chair: I read your mind.

Okay. All right. I'll open up the floor to more discussion. Mr. Schow, you're next up on the list.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Decore, and I, too, have a great amount of respect for seniors and those living in senior care. Prior to the pandemic I used to love to spend time in visiting with them and getting to know them.

With that said, this bill has been proposed before, and I believe the issue is well understood by members of this committee. You know, I would feel comfortable even to go as far as to say that the bill should proceed to the Chamber. Now, I know that we're not at that point of this conversation yet. But, with that said, we also did have three presenters today, and even with the last presenter, before the time ran out, we had no more questions, which indicated to me that I think that most of the questions that were on the minds of members of this committee may have been answered. Now, I hate to presuppose too much, but that would be the impression that I got.

So, with that said, I think that this is a bill that's ready to go to the Chamber, and I think we should have an opportunity to debate it there and not delay that process. I would not recommend stakeholders. Rather, I recommend that we proceed. But we'll get to that point next.

The Chair: Sure. Mr. Nielsen, go ahead, please, sir.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I think I'll have to remind committee members that the whole premise of this committee is to be able to not only review private members' legislation – as we know, private members don't have the type of resources that government does when it comes to stakeholder engagement. The whole process is to be able to listen to stakeholders. If we continue not to do that, it undermines the whole premise of the committee. We might as well just decide right in the House whether a private member's bill should proceed to second reading or Committee of the Whole, whatnot, and skip this entire process with the private members' committee. We need to listen to stakeholders, and we need to invite them.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Schow, go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, maybe some of the advice the Member for Edmonton-Decore has made should be taken under advisement, especially given some of the political games the opposition played yesterday with private members' business, specifically private members' motions and private members' bills. While I think that might be funny to members opposite, I don't think there's a lot of precedent there for what happened yesterday specifically with private members' bills and adjourning debate on second reading.

With that said . . .

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order was called.

Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that certainly under 23 a member will be called to order if he – sorry.

The Chair: Standing Order 23 is pretty broad here.

Mr. Dang: Sure. Yeah. Of course. Standing Order 23(f), "debates any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is that Member's intention to move that it be rescinded." Obviously, the motions that were made yesterday in the House were already moved and dealt with accordingly, and I think that the member should move on and speak to the matter at hand.

Mr. Schow: I'm happy to respond to that.

The Chair: Sure. Mr. Schow.

Mr. Schow: Sure. The standing order that Member Dang is referring to suggests that it would be out of order for me to try to relitigate the vote. I'm not doing that. I'm simply making a reference to it, something that members in the Chamber and in this committee do on a regular basis, which is refer to how members have voted on bills and refer to, I guess, past bills that have been deliberated in the Chamber. I am not necessarily trying to go back and have a conversation about whether someone should or should not have voted; I'm simply pointing out that the members opposite were playing procedural games yesterday with private members' business. I don't see how that's a point of order, simply making reference to it. I don't find this a point of order, and I encourage you to rule against this point of order.

The Chair: Any other comments?

Okay. Hearing and seeing none, I do not believe that there is a point of order. I do not believe that we're relitigating what was

going on in the House. Stating some objective facts as to what transpired yesterday in the House is not opening the door to any sort of relitigation. I'm going to find that there is no point of order, but I do caution the member and ask that he move on with his point.

Mr. Schow: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I take those comments under advisement.

Just to conclude my remarks, I think I've been pretty clear that I don't think that necessarily stakeholders need to be brought in for this specific bill. We have brought in stakeholders in the past, so to suggest that we have forgone this process would also be an incorrect assessment of how this committee has operated previously. In this instance I would not recommend stakeholders. I believe that the issues under discussion are well understood, and like I said, I think the bill has merit. That could be debated in the Chamber and voted on there. At this time I'd vote against this motion.

10:45

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Hearing and seeing none, we'll just put the question on the floor, then. Mr. Nielsen to move that

the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills invite up to six stakeholders, three proposed by the government caucus and three proposed by the Official Opposition caucus, to make presentations regarding Bill 215, Seniors Advocate Act, at an upcoming meeting and provide the stakeholders list to the chair by noon on Wednesday, April 21, 2021.

For those in the room, all those in favour, say aye. Any opposed in the room? Okay. Now we'll go to the members on the videoconference. All those in favour, say aye. All those opposed, say no. Okay. Thank you. The motion is defeated.

Mr. Nielsen: Recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: This is a recorded vote. We will do a recorded vote here. Within the room, all those in favour, if you can just raise your hand. Thank you. Mr. Nielsen and Mr. Dang. Then we will go to those on the videoconference. As per previous meetings I will not call upon you because there certainly is an option that you may choose not to vote, so I'm going to ask – those members who are on videoconference are going to have to find a way to say something. All those in favour, please let me know.

Mr. Dach: Aye.

Member Irwin: Member Irwin.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hearing and seeing nobody else, then, we will now go to all those opposed within the room. Just raise your hand. Thank you. Mr. Schow. Then all those on the videoconference, if you can just identify yourselves. Go ahead.

Mr. Sigurdson: No.

Mr. Rutherford: No.

Mr. Amery: No.

Mr. Getson: No.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Chair, I'm in contact right now with Member Glasgow, who's having technical difficulties with her Internet. I don't know if she's able to answer that question.

The Chair: Okay. I appreciate you noting that. Hopefully, she can fix her technical difficulties.

I believe that's all the committee members at this time. What do we have, Mr. Clerk?

Mr. Huffman: For the motion, we have four; against, five.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

That motion has been defeated.

We will now go to deliberations on Bill 215. The committee will now begin its deliberations on Bill 215 at this time. The committee must decide whether to recommend that the bill proceed or not proceed and may also consider observations, opinions, or recommendations with respect to Bill 215. The committee's process allows for up to 60 minutes of deliberations on the bill although members may extend this time limit if there is a consensus that additional time is necessary. I'll open up the floor to discussion. Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's very disappointing that we're not able to hear from, you know, even just a few stakeholders about how an independent office could interact with them.

I guess, that being said, I would suggest that I make a motion to have the bill proceed to the House.

The Chair: Great. Well, we have a possible draft motion here. Mr. Nielsen moves that the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills recommend that Bill 215, Seniors Advocate Act, proceed.

Does that sound about right, sir?

Mr. Nielsen: Sounds about right.

The Chair: Okay. Any others? Mr. Schow, go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Would anybody else like to say anything?

Hearing and seeing none, we'll put the question on the floor to the committee. Mr. Nielsen moves that

the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills recommend that Bill 215, Seniors Advocate Act, proceed.

All those in favour in the room, say aye. Any opposed? Okay. On the videoconference, all those in favour, say aye. Okay. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none, thank you very much.

That motion has been carried.

Hon. members, the committee has concluded its deliberations on Bill 215 and now should consider directing research services to prepare a draft report, including the committee's recommendations. Would a member move a motion to direct research services to prepare the committee's draft report?

Mr. Nielsen: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nielsen. Mr. Nielsen will move that the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills (a) direct research services to prepare a draft report on the committee's review of Bill 215, Seniors Advocate Act, which includes the committee's recommendations, and (b) authorize the chair to approve the committee's final report to the Assembly on or before Thursday, April 22, 2021.

Any questions?

Hearing and seeing none, the question will be put on the floor. All those in favour, say aye. On videoconference? Any opposed?

Hearing and seeing none,

that motion has been carried.

All right. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nielsen: Just a point of clarification. If a minority report were to be added, what would that due date be?

The Chair: Sure. We'll go to the clerk's office for clarification on that.

Mr. Huffman: Generally speaking, I believe that the minority report is usually about a day after the report is finished, so I would say that April 23 is probably a good date for that.

The Chair: Okay. Does that help, Mr. Nielsen? April 23. Okay. Sorry. Hang on a second. Point of clarification.

Mr. Huffman: Sorry. Probably a better date for that would be noon on Thursday, April 22. That would be the best.

The Chair: There you go, sir. Noon on April 22. Okay. Thank you.

We'll next go to the review of Bill 216, the Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act. This bill was referred to the committee on Wednesday, April 15, 2021. In accordance with Standing Order 74.11 the committee's report to the Assembly is due on May 6. At this time I'd like to invite Member Jackie Lovely to provide a five-minute presentation, and then I will open the floor to questions from committee members. I see the member is online.

Member, thank you very much for being with us today. You'll have five minutes for your presentation. You may go ahead. Thank you. The floor is yours.

Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to be here before the committee to present my bill. This is the very first bill that I'm bringing forward, so it's one that's, of course, very important to me. If passed, this bill would establish the week commencing on the first or second Sunday in October as Fire Prevention Week and the Saturday of Fire Prevention Week as fire services recognition day.

There are many reasons why this particular bill is of importance to me. I'll first share a story about when I was a child, about eight years old. My family had a very bad fire on our farm. It was a building where we had a number of pieces of important, expensive machinery stored, and my parents ran into the burning building to save as many pieces of equipment as they could. They were able to get some of the vehicles out, but then my father went back in when he shouldn't have. He ended up suffering from very severe smoke inhalation and singed off his eyebrows. Who came in the meantime, while the building was burning, was the volunteer fire department. We also had the EMS team show up. It was because of the actions of those people that I still have my father alive with us today, so I'm very grateful for the work of those volunteers.

10:55

I wanted to go on to just say that in my Camrose constituency we have a number of volunteer firefighters who have successfully put out many fires and saved countless lives, and I feel it's important to give them recognition. One of the first places that I visited after being elected was the Camrose fire hall. The chief had a display set up for Fire Prevention Week, and he showed me many items that were severely melted and unrecognizable. It was an eye-opening experience to see how fires start and the damage that can be done. I also heard from the fire chief of Camrose county, who continues to keep me updated with many of the situations that he and his team

continue to deal with. Our firefighters spend many hours not only putting out fires but also training in order to be prepared for any situation.

It's an honour and a pleasure for me to be able to champion this bill, and I look forward to your support and direction.

The Chair: Okay. Great. Well, thank you very much, Member, for your presentation.

This is a government member's bill, so we're going to go to the Official Opposition for a question, followed by a supplemental question. Member Irwin, you're first on the list. Go ahead, please.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Member Lovely. Of course, you know, I absolutely am so grateful for the work that firefighters and folks working in fire services do. We absolutely need to recognize their work. Now, I just need to ask a little bit, though. We've actually had conversations with firefighters, oh, a fair bit lately. In fact, not too long ago Member Phillips presented Bill 209. During those deliberations Brad Readman – he's the president of the Fire Fighters Association – presented, and he spoke in support of that bill, that basically would have meant that they would have control over their pensions, that firefighters would have jurisdiction over their pensions. I'm curious. You know, we're hearing from a lot of firefighters who want support from this government, tangible support. Did you consult with the Fire Fighters Association, and if so, what did they have to tell you?

Ms Lovely: I'm sorry, Member. You cut out a little bit when you were asking the question, and I didn't hear the full question.

Member Irwin: Okay. I'll repeat the question. No problem. Basically, I was talking about the fact that we've had multiple conversations with firefighters. In fact, not too long ago, when Member Phillips presented Bill 209, Brad Readman – he's the president of the Fire Fighters Association – presented, and he spoke in support of that bill, which basically would have meant that firefighters have control over their pensions. We know we've heard a lot from firefighters, and we know they're calling for tangible support from this government. So I'm curious. In developing Bill 216, did you consult with the Fire Fighters Association? If so, what did they have to tell you?

Ms Lovely: Okay. Thank you so much. I do appreciate you repeating. The Internet connection is choppy out here in rural Alberta sometimes. I did do some consultation, and I continue to do it. I did speak with the Camrose fire chief, Peter Krich; the deputy fire chief, Joe Mah; and the Camrose county fire chief, Ross Penner. I also spoke with Alberta Fire Chiefs Association's executive director, Fred Tyrell, and I have put in a call but have not yet connected with the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association president, Randy Schroeder. I left a message for him and hope to connect with him today.

We do have a pancake breakfast that we do. Well, since COVID we haven't been able to do it. It's in recognition of the firefighters, because they're mostly volunteer out here in my constituency. I did have an opportunity to speak with almost all of them. They do this work because it's of importance to them. They step away from their jobs or their personal commitments and their families to be able to go out and put out these fires in the community because it's important to them to roll up their sleeves. My bill would simply be a matter of saying thank you to those people who are volunteers.

The Chair: Member Irwin, go ahead, please.

Member Irwin: Absolutely. I appreciate that completely, but I think one of the best ways that we could show our thanks and our gratitude to our firefighters would be by acknowledging their requests to have their pensions protected. Sadly, your government refused that very essential . . .

Ms Glasgo: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. A point of order has been called. Member Glasgo, go ahead.

Ms Glasgo: Yes, Mr. Chair. Under 23(b), speaks to matters other than those under consideration. We've actually already addressed Member Phillips's bill, Bill 209. It's no longer on the floor anymore. We're under Bill 216, which establishes, I believe, an awareness of fire week in Alberta by MLA Lovely. I think these questions are out of order, and you should rule them as such if you so choose.

The Chair: Thank you.
Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think, certainly, the member is speaking about firefighters and concerns that firefighters have raised. It's totally in line with the bill. As we know, we are talking about fire prevention awareness week, and this is something that we are speaking on, and we had the privilege in this place to hear from actual firefighters, and I think that when we have those discussions and debates, I think that this line of questioning is coming back to firefighters. I would hope that we could look forward to hearing the rest of it.

The Chair: Thank you very much to both members for your presentations.

I do find, Member Irwin, that you were certainly bordering very, very close to almost relitigating Bill 209, which this committee has already dealt with. However, I'm going to not rule this a point of order. But I will say that if you continue down this line of questioning, I may have to rethink my decision on that.

That being said, I'd just ask you to please stay within the scope of the bill that's being presented right now and continue on.

Thank you very much.

Member Irwin: Absolutely. You know, all I was doing was sharing my frustration and the fact that we're hearing from firefighters that they want concrete, tangible support, not symbolic gestures. Absolutely, as I said, we fully support firefighters, and we've shown that multiple times as the Official Opposition.

I guess I would just like to ask the member if she could just elaborate a little bit more. She talked about some of the folks with whom she consulted. If she could just share a little bit more about the nature of some of those conversations.

Ms Lovely: I will note that firefighters continue to maintain control of their pension. In terms of my bill I think maybe what I'll do, because it's very brief, I'll just read through it so there's a hundred per cent clarity about what it is that my bill is trying to achieve. It's Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act.

Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, enacts as follows:

Purposes

1 The purposes of this Act are

- (a) to raise the public's awareness of the importance of fire safety and prevention measures as a means to reduce the risk of a fire or fire hazard from occurring,
- and

- (b) to recognize the valuable contributions and sacrifices that are regularly made by the organizations and individuals who provide fire services, thereby ensuring Albertans' safety and reducing the extent of damage caused when a fire does occur.

Fire Prevention Week and Fire Service Recognition Day

2 Each year the Lieutenant Governor in Council must authorize the issuance of a proclamation that recognizes

- (a) the week that commences on the first or second Sunday in October and ends on the following Saturday as "Fire Prevention Week", and
- (b) the Saturday that occurs within Fire Prevention Week as "Fire Services Recognition Day".

So, you know, very succinctly, that is the bill that I would like to put forward.

Interestingly enough, you know, I was out for a run last night just through our little beautiful river valley here in Camrose, and I happened to come across a friend of mine who lives just at the top of the hill. She said, "Jackie, have you seen the fire that happened yesterday?" and I said no. It was the house right beside hers and the neighbour on the other side of the house that burned. The two ladies were walking together, and the other lady said, "You know, my house started melting." She pointed out the damage, and she said, "Lookit, my house started to melt, and it was about to catch on fire as well."

Here the community is standing out at 11:30 p.m. that night, the night before, and it was through the work of some volunteer firefighters who came quickly and put out that fire, which prevented the rest of the block from engulfing in flames. I told them that I was bringing forward this bill, and they said: "Oh, thank goodness. You know, our volunteer firefighters in this community really do need to be commended and thanked." So I'm really grateful to have this opportunity.

The Chair: All right. Member Glasgo for a question, please.

Ms Glasgo: Yes. Good morning, Ms Lovely. I wanted to thank you so much for bringing this bill forward. Volunteer firefighters are extremely important, and our service men and women in any uniform are extremely important here in Alberta. Without them, we wouldn't be able to feel safe. I know I wouldn't feel nearly as safe without their support and their attention to our communities both urban and rural.

I would be remiss if I didn't speak about and first acknowledge that our community in southeastern Alberta suffered a great loss with a wildfire a couple years ago. Mr. James Hargrave was a fantastic land steward, rancher, conservationist, everything. He passed away in a tragic accident with a grass fire that occurred in southeastern Alberta.

11:05

I think that acknowledging the risks that are associated and honouring these people for their sacrifice – like, many of them, as we know, are unpaid. They are moms and dads and teachers or whatever else. They're just doing this in their spare time because they want to make sure that our communities are safe and taken care of. My hat goes off to all of the firefighters in Brooks-Medicine Hat and around the province and all those friends of Mr. Hargrave who are still remembering him as the community servant that he was. For me, I know that that's why I look forward to supporting this bill in the Legislature, just to acknowledge that.

Can you elaborate on fire safety and why you chose this topic specifically for a private member's bill? We know that you very rarely even get one as a private member, so I was curious if you could elaborate on why exactly you chose this topic.

Ms Lovely: Well, you know, most importantly is the personal connection with my family, which I've already mentioned. Those few moments could have changed our family's entire life, where my father, out of desperation to try to save equipment, didn't think that maybe this would be covered by insurance. He just went in, because he worked so hard, just to try to save that equipment, to make sure that they had the pieces of farm machinery that they needed in order to do their seeding and the trucks and all that expensive equipment that they worked for very many years to pay for. There are a lot of people who are in similar situations.

You had mentioned grass fires. In fact, just a couple of days ago the fire chief for Camrose county sent me a little text, and he said: "Hey, there's a bad grass fire that I'm heading out to. I'm hoping that you'll be able to come out with me as the MLA to be able to see how we put out these fires." I've had several conversations with him before about my interest in coming out, in seeing what they do. You know, these grass fires just take off so quickly, and it can be devastating to a community. I mean, look in southern Alberta. We had smoke all the way up here, past Camrose and in through Saskatchewan, as a result of those fires.

You know, the work that our volunteer firefighters do is so very important. I think that every one of us as MLAs, I mean, hears stories about what's happening in our communities, and this is a time for us to champion this opportunity, to say thank you to these volunteers. They're our neighbours and, as you mentioned, teachers and lawyers and all kinds of people who contribute to our society, but they take that extra measure and go above and beyond and dedicate their personal time, time away from their jobs, time away from their families, time away from their personal interests to go and save the community from virtually burning down, because fire happens very quickly.

I had mentioned my neighbours who lived at the top of the hill. They experienced that fire between the two of them. That was in 17 minutes that the house burned down. I went up to the top of the hill, and I just could not believe what happened in 17 minutes. It was devastating.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Member.

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Glasgo, you have a second.

Ms Glasgo: No, the Official Opposition can go ahead.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Member Dach, go ahead, please.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Member Lovely, for your presentation. I certainly share your adoration and respect for our firefighting community in Alberta. I know that as a former critic for Ag and Forestry, I had the opportunity to meet a number of our firefighters, particularly those in the rappel program. We've seen, of course, some cuts to that RAP program, meaning that the program was dissolved.

I'm just thinking, you know, in your deliberations, Madam Lovely, that if indeed you thought you might even go further than just actual recognition and public awareness, you might have actually tried to advocate for these people who we so dearly respect and love, who fight fires and save lives, by perhaps going even deeper with the private member's bill, which really doesn't happen very often, and suggesting to the government or recommending in your bill that you actually increase the funding for training, perhaps, in rural areas like Camrose, where firefighters, particularly volunteer firefighters, have been really begging for more funding through the municipalities to properly train themselves so that they

can retain their volunteer firefighters, who are taxed enormously, as you well mentioned, to put forward of their own private time and risk themselves, when, in fact, they don't have the services that they feel they need to actually perform their jobs in terms of equipment and in terms of training because that funding for training was reduced as well.

I'm just wondering if you had any thoughts about going even further, beyond the recognition, and advocating for things that these volunteer firefighters and the paid firefighter community are talking about in terms of the supports that they need to function properly.

There are communities that have got private firefighting outfits now that are actually charging for services. That astounded me to hear the other day, when somebody's garage burned down and they got a bill for \$62,000 from the fire department. The fire department asked them if they were going to stay overnight themselves to watch a very hot propane tank. If so, they could save themselves another \$60,000.

There are lots of issues with respect to rural firefighting and the firefighting efforts of our first responders that could have been addressed in this bill. I think that you've lost a very good opportunity to really dig deeper and provide some excellent advocacy and support for our firefighters. Certainly, you know, making the public more aware, having a fire prevention and fire services recognition is something I'm sure the firefighters appreciate, but, boy, it would have been really an opportunity for you, I think, to use this private member's bill to go into a little deeper level of support for firefighters . . .

The Chair: Mr. Dach, you had quite a preamble there. Do you have a question for the guest?

Mr. Dach: Yeah. Why didn't you go a little deeper into supporting our firefighters with the recommendation for measures that they be properly supported by way of funding and training by our government?

Ms Lovely: Well, Member, I'm so glad to have this opportunity to address your point. As the member knows, we're limited in the types of bills we can do as private members, and I think that this bill is important in recognizing the great work that the service members do in the community. Actually, it's interesting that you do bring this up, and I'm so glad to have this opportunity to just be very frank with the community.

I did have a conversation. I had mentioned the fire chief for Camrose county. The only point that was important to him was that they be able to go ahead and do an outside practice that they had scheduled. Of course, they want to abide by all the COVID rules. I did check with the minister's office, and he said, well, through their team, that they were given permission to go ahead. So of course, they abided by all the COVID regulations.

That practice and getting together regularly really allows them to have the knowledge and the skills to be able to deal with all kinds of situations because, you know, when you're called out to a fire, you don't really know what's going to happen next or what you're being called out to; they just know that there's a fire to go to. The more prepared that they are as members and the more skills that they're able to develop, I think, is certainly beneficial for the entire community.

Does it cost money? Not necessarily. The cost, actually, to these volunteers is their time, and that's what I would like to acknowledge in my opportunity to bring forward this bill. It is simply an opportunity for me to say thank you. This is a golden opportunity, a rare privilege for me as an MLA to say thank you to those people who saved my father and to say thank you to those people who

saved this community that I just walked by last night and to say thank you to those community members who kept the fire at bay from burning across our countryside here in Camrose constituency.

You know, you as a member – there are all kinds of fires that happen in the city of Edmonton. When I lived there, the house across the street burned down. We packed up the family and we got out of there, but I was just astounded at the blocks and blocks and blocks of people that were coming towards the fire just to see what was happening. It was to the extent that the fire truck couldn't even make its way to the fire because there were so many people coming to see what was going on. I just think that it's very important that we draw attention to this opportunity to say thank you to all these brave men and women who fight fires on our behalf.

11:15

The Chair: All right. Member Dach, a quick follow-up, please.

Mr. Dach: Yeah. Just a quick follow-up. I still am not convinced that you've made full use of your opportunity with this private member's bill, and I would have been very glad to see you put forward measures that advocate on their behalf rather than just simply saying thank you. Is there any possibility . . .

Mr. Rutherford: Point of order.

The Chair: Sorry, Member Dach. I heard a point of order. Member Rutherford, go ahead.

Mr. Rutherford: Standing Order 23(b)(i):

- (b) speaks to matters other than
 - (i) the question under discussion.

We're here to talk about the bill that Member Lovely has put forward, not what Member Dach had hoped might be in there and is frequently talking about things that would cost money. We know that private members' bills are not allowed to go down that path either. I think we should just ask questions about the bill at hand and keep the topic to that, please.

The Chair: Okay. Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that certainly you've given some guidance on this today already regarding matters which are or are not in order. However, I would also suggest that speaking to matters and asking about consultations that are done and what may or may not be proposed in the future is in order as it is possible at future readings of this bill to propose things such as amendments and whatnot. Understanding our guest today and understanding the intentions of our guest today are important for this process.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

All right. I'm prepared to rule. Member Dach, you are certainly bordering very, very close. I mean, the bill that is in front of you is the bill that is in front of you. What the member may or may not have chosen to put in the bill: I'm certain that that is her decision as the sponsor of that particular bill. That being said, I would appreciate, since you are on your second question, that you be very brief. Ask your question, and then we would allow at least one more member to ask a question. We only have two minutes at this time, so I will not rule it as a point of order, but I'm going to ask that you ask your question and move on.

Thank you.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. I'll be brief. I guess my bottom line is that I wanted to know if the member proposing this bill would be willing to consider amendments to it that would allow a greater

element of advocacy on behalf of firefighters to be included in the bill on top of the appreciation effort.

Ms Lovely: Well, I'll certainly take it under advisement. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. We'll go to Mr. R.J. Sigurdson. Go ahead.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Member Lovely. I mean, as a person who has friends that serve in both the volunteer and paid fire departments in my area, I think it's linear, across everybody within our government and, I'm sure, within the Assembly itself, that we all appreciate the hard work that our firefighters do, putting their lives on the line every day.

But I want to focus on one specific thing that I always hear from them, that the best thing we can do when it comes to fires is prevent them from happening in the first place. When we look at the FireSmart program through Ag and Forestry, that tries to educate people to be able to prevent fires, and, you know, we look at the lessons we learned through wildfires, the Fort McMurray fires, can you speak a little bit to the point of your bill, which I think is that education piece about fire prevention and how important that is?

Ms Lovely: Well, I think that, you know, fire prevention certainly is important. I didn't really focus on that so much in my bill; it was more of an opportunity to say thank you to the fire team.

I'll just go back. You know, this can turn into so many things, as I mentioned. Fire prevention week and fire service recognition day: by bringing those items forward, I think that it will allow people in our community who fight fires to have that focus on themselves so that they can say: hey, you know, we've had a lot of wildfires because of X.

The Chair: Member Lovely, the time has expired, but I'll let you finish your final point to the committee. Go ahead.

Ms Lovely: That was it. My point has been made. Thank you so much, Member. I appreciate the question.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Member Lovely, thank you very much for being with us today.

Next we are going to go to the technical briefing by the ministry of culture and multiculturalism. The committee invited the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women to provide a technical briefing on Bill 216. However, the ministry respectfully declined to present, saying that they did not have any additional information that would support the committee's review of Bill 216.

That being said, we're going to go to decisions on the review of Bill 216. The committee must now decide how to conduct its review of Bill 216. Would members like to invite stakeholders to present? Let's open up the floor. I see Mr. Nielsen is on the list first. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I do want to thank Member Lovely for bringing the bill forward. Like everybody else that's spoken here so far, I'm very appreciative of our firefighters, EMS, the members that serve in both roles. I think that when we're talking about recognition as a whole – you know, we've heard that part about the education component – I don't think I could stress enough that in order to recognize a profession like firefighting, it's so important to understand not only what they face but how they face it each and every day when they go to a call.

I've had the great privilege of being able to participate in Fire Ops 101 with Edmonton fire twice now. There's nothing like being in an enclosed room at 450 degrees, Mr. Chair. I mean, I don't even cook my turkey at that level. But understanding what it is that they go through – the demonstration that I've seen was simulating apartments, one without a sprinkler, one with a sprinkler, and a timer running off to the side. At the five-minute mark the structure without the sprinkler: fully engulfed. The realization came to me at that time, understanding what it is they face, that it wasn't about trying to save the structure at that point, that it was about trying to save everything else around it.

If we're going to be able to add that education piece to recognition, we need to understand what it is they face. Hearing specifically from firefighters as stakeholders as to how we can make the recognition very, very solid for the people I think will be a benefit, especially since we weren't able to get a technical briefing from the ministry.

With that, I will move a motion that I'm going to guess you might even know word for word.

The Chair: You're looking to invite stakeholders. Is that correct, sir?

Mr. Nielsen: I am.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Nielsen would move that the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills invite up to six stakeholders, three proposed by the government caucus and three proposed by the Official Opposition caucus, to make presentations regarding Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act, at an upcoming meeting and provide a stakeholder list to the chair by noon on Wednesday, April 21, 2021.

I have Mr. Getson on the list next to speak.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the member for bringing this forward. Obviously, out in rural Alberta and in the constituency of Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland we kind of have a shadow group of both. The service that these folks provide is exemplary, to say the least. I know that they've had some problems with recruiting, and I think that this would go a long way towards that.

Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford as well for mentioning to bring in stakeholders. I couldn't agree more to have stakeholders present to help support this and to really give good input on all the great things that they do out there. So thank you for bringing this forward, and I look forward to any further remarks and on which stakeholders we can present to have come forward.

The Chair: Okay. It seems like there's some consensus here. Mr. Dach, go ahead, please.

Mr. Dach: Yeah. Certainly, I concur that we should be bringing stakeholders forward to speak about the recognition that the firefighters deserve and allow them to speak about the supports that they find are lacking and any gaps that they feel that they have in their ability to provide the services that we so richly appreciate.

The Chair: Okay. Any other comments?

Hearing and seeing none, on the motion as proposed by Mr. Nielsen, which is on the floor, I will pose the question now to the committee members in regard to inviting stakeholders. All those in favour, say aye. Okay. On videoconference? Any opposed, say no. Hearing and seeing none,

that motion has been carried. Thank you very much.

11:25

All right. The committee will now begin its deliberations on Bill 215. At this time the committee must decide whether to recommend that bill – oh, sorry. My apologies. We've got this all over the place. This has been a long day already.

Okay. We've got other business. All right. Are there any other issues for discussion at today's meeting? Hearing and seeing none, all right.

The date of the next meeting will be at the call of the chair.

Mr. Nielsen, I'm going to put words in your mouth. Do you want to adjourn?

Mr. Nielsen: Motion to adjourn.

The Chair: All right. All those in favour, say aye. On videoconference? I hear ayes. Anybody opposed? Hearing and seeing none, all right. The motion is carried. Everybody, have a great day. Thanks very much. Cheers.

[The committee adjourned at 11:26 a.m.]

