



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021
Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act
Stakeholder Presentations

Monday, May 3, 2021
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-2-20

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Second Session**

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC), Deputy Chair

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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
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Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)

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Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)

Bill Pr. 2 Sponsor

Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)

Bill 216 Sponsor

Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)

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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Participants

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Peter Krich, Fire Chief, City of Camrose Fire Department	
Brad Readman, President, Alberta Fire Fighters Association	
Greg Rehman, President, Edmonton Fire Fighters' Union	

9 a.m.

Monday, May 3, 2021

[Mr. Ellis in the chair]

The Chair: All right. Good morning, everybody. 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, MLA for Calgary-West and chair of the committee. I'd like to ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then I'll call on those joining in by videoconference. We'll begin to my right.

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

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. Thank you.

Members joining us via videoconference. We'll start with Mr. Dang.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Irwin.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Lori Sigurdson.

Ms Sigurdson: Good morning. Lori Sigurdson, Edmonton-Riverview.

The Chair: Thank you.

Member R.J. Sigurdson.

Mr. Sigurdson: Good morning. R.J. Sigurdson, Highwood.

The Chair: Member Getson.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Amery.

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

The Chair: Member Glasgo.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Rutherford.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

We have two members joining us today as they are sponsors of the bills.

Member Phillips, if you wouldn't mind just introducing yourself. You're the sponsor of Bill Pr. 2.

Ms Phillips: Good morning. Shannon Phillips, Lethbridge-West.

The Chair: Thank you so much for being here.

Also, Member Lovely, who is a little bit down on the schedule. You can introduce yourself, Member Lovely. Go ahead.

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. MLA Jackie Lovely from the constituency of Camrose.

The Chair: Thank you. Just for the record the last two members are not voting members of the committee, but thank you very much for being sponsors of the two bills that we'll be discussing here today.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. According to the February 22, 2021, memo from the hon. Speaker Cooper I'd like to 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 covering. Based on the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health regarding physical distancing, meeting attendees are reminded to leave the appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV, and the audio- and videostream and transcript of the meeting can be accessed on the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating by videoconference are asked to please turn on your camera while speaking and mute your microphone when not speaking.

Members participating virtually who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or send a message into Teams, in the chat area, to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

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

Hearing and seeing none, can I get someone to move the agenda?

Mr. Schow: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Schow to move that the agenda for the May 3, 2021, meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills be adopted as distributed. All in favour, say aye. On videoconference? Thank you. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none, that motion is carried.

We will now move to the approval of the minutes. Hon. members, we have the minutes of our last meeting, on April 20, to review. Are there any errors or omissions of note? If not, would a member like to make a motion to approve the minutes?

Mr. Nielsen: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen, thank you very much. Mr. Nielsen will move that the minutes of the April 20, 2021, meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills be approved as distributed. All in favour, say aye. On videoconference? Thank you. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none, that motion has been carried.

Next we'll move to the review of Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021, a hearing on the petition. Hon. members, at our meeting on March 24 the committee received an overview of the petition for Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021, from Parliamentary Counsel, and the petition was found to be in compliance with standing orders 90 through to 94. On March 25 the chair reported to the Assembly on the petition pursuant to Standing Order 99, and the bill was subsequently introduced in the Assembly on April 12 by the bill sponsor, Member Shannon Phillips, the MLA for Lethbridge-West. In accordance with Standing Order 100 the bill was referred to the committee after it was introduced.

I will also note that at the committee's April 13 meeting, the committee passed a motion to authorize the petitioner and their legal counsel to participate in today's hearing by videoconference on the condition that the petitioner provide the committee with an affidavit on or before Friday, April 23, that contains the following information: one, the actions taken by the petitioner to identify whether the interests of any third parties would be adversely impacted by the proposed amendments to the United Church of Canada Act contained in Bill Pr. 2, if enacted, including whether the petitioner is aware of any objections to the proposed amendments; two, whether the petitioner is aware of any impacts or potential impacts on the ownership of property by the United Church of Canada or any of its congregations in Alberta that may result from the enactment of the proposed amendments to the United Church of Canada Act contained in Bill Pr. 2; three, whether the petitioner is aware of any current or potential litigation or other legal proceedings in connection with the restructuring of the United Church of Canada and its assets and liabilities in Alberta; four, an exhibit evidencing the resolution by the United Church of Canada authorizing its restructuring, such certified copy of the minutes of the meetings at which the resolution was passed; and, five, any additional information the petitioner has and believes is relevant to the review of Bill Pr. 2. For the record the committee received a sworn affidavit from the petitioner on Friday, April 23, and an electronic copy was made available on the committee's internal website for members to review.

Finally, in accordance with Standing Order 104, Parliamentary Counsel's report on the petition for Bill Pr. 2 was distributed to members on Thursday.

This morning the committee will be hearing from the petitioner for Bill Pr. 2. Following the presentation, the committee members will be provided the opportunity to ask questions of the petitioner. Although the petitioner will not be participating under oath this morning, I would strongly encourage members to ask detailed questions of the petitioner so that information contained in the affidavit can be confirmed on the record. Following this morning's hearing, the committee may then deliberate on the bill and ultimately make one of three recommendations: one, that the bill proceed; two, that it proceed with amendments; or, three, that it not proceed.

Once we have decided on our recommendation, I will then report on behalf of the committee to the Assembly depending on the decision with respect to the bill. It would then follow the same process as any other bill in the Assembly; namely, proceeding to second reading, Committee of the Whole, third reading, and, of course, Royal Assent. Are there any questions before we invite the petitioner to present? Hearing and seeing none.

Okay. As this is a private bill rather than a private member's public bill, I would suggest to the committee that we provide up to 10 minutes for opening remarks on this bill. Would that be acceptable to the committee? Seeing a lot of nodding of heads. Okay. Thank you very much.

Joining us today we have the petitioner and the legal counsel. Welcome, everybody. We have Reverend Michael Blair, the general secretary of the United Church of Canada; and Ms Heather Keachie, external legal counsel to the United Church of Canada, Gardiner Roberts LLP. Welcome to both of you. Thank you for joining us here today. Whenever you're ready, you're going to have up to 10 minutes to talk to the committee. The floor is yours.

Thank you very much.

Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021

Reverend Blair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the standing committee. I'm the Reverend Michael Blair, and I serve as the general secretary of the United Church of Canada. I am here today with Ms Heather Keachie, our legal counsel for the United Church. It is my pleasure to speak to you in regard to Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021.

9:10

The United Church of Canada has been an important part of the fabric of the Canadian mosaic and part of the nation-building enterprise of the late 19th and early 20th century and is considered to be the largest Protestant denomination in Canada. It was incorporated federally in 1924, and like any public institution of its age, it needed some upgrading in order to be able to reflect the reality of the current context. So after almost 90 years it embarked on a process to restructure its governance within the limits of the rights granted to it by the United Church of Canada Act and its basis of union. The process involved extensive engagement with the entire church over a period of six years.

After the confirmation of the remit results in July 2018, the church moved officially into a new structure on January 1, 2019. The structural changes eliminated two levels of governance, the presbyteries and conferences, and created a new level called regents. It also changed the language of the governance structure from courts to councils. These structural changes have necessitated a change to the United Church of Canada Act, 2019, federally, as well as the provincial acts, hence our request to amend the act.

In addition, property rights are provincial responsibilities, and although there is no change to how the United Church property is owned and managed, the change to the internal governance structure also requires that the names of the governance bodies be adjusted.

The amendments requested reflect these internal governance changes. Specifically, there are three discrete changes that we are requesting. The bill repeals the definition section of the old act, reorders the definitions alphabetically, adds definitions of presbytery, conference, and general council, and amends the definition of congregation to make a few other minor drafting changes as well. The revised definitions allow the act to be read, where the context requires, in a way that takes into account the new governance structure of the United Church.

Secondly, the bill includes a transition provision that provides that nothing in this amendment act will affect the conveyance of any kind that was done in accordance to the previous act. The provisions should provide certainty and comfort that this bill is not affecting the ownership and property rights of any United Church congregations in Alberta.

The bill repeals and replaces schedule A. Schedule A is called the "Trusts of Model Deed," and it provides the authority for trustees to hold property in trust for the congregation. It also includes the process and authorization requirements for how trustees can manage and dispose of property. The replaced schedule A includes

the updated terminology to reflect the internal governance changes within the United Church. Specifically, it replaces presbyteries and conference with regional councils in most places. In one instance a provision, which provides a right of appeal to the congregations, the appellate body, has been changed from the conference to the national body, the denominational council. The replaced schedule A also updates the formatting of the schedule so that there is a "Column One" and a "Column Two" as referenced in the act.

This proposed legislation is consistent with other provincial bills that have been passed or are in the legislative process currently.

Thank you for your consideration. Ms Keachie and I are happy to respond to any questions you may have.

The Chair: Well, Reverend, thank you very much, sir, for your presentation. We still have a few minutes. If you want to make any further comments, you certainly can. Otherwise, we will move on to questions.

We'll move on to questions. Okay. I'll open the floor. I don't really have anybody on a list at the moment here. Okay. We'll start with Mr. Schow, and then we'll go to Mr. Nielsen.

Thank you.

Mr. Schow: Thank you for that presentation. I appreciate your remarks. I just had a question. You talked earlier in your statement about the six years of consultation. Can you maybe outline or go into a little greater detail about that consultation and what process you used or, you know, basically just elaborate a little bit on what the consultation process looked like?

Reverend Blair: The general council approved the work of restructuring, to begin a process. We had a committee that was set up that was responsible to design a process of consultation with the church. There were meetings throughout all the regions of the church with the proposals, the ideas of what the restructure may look like. Then in our general council in 2015 there was a significant period where each of the proposed recommendations was explored by the council. The council is made up of representation from all across the country. There was a detailed discussion about the changes that were made, and then there was a final proposal that was approved. Once that proposal was approved, then it needed – because we have a process called remits, that proposal was sent out again across the church for conversation and for a vote. It required that each conference vote in favour or against the changes, and the changes were approved by that process.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you have a follow-up, sir?

Mr. Schow: No, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No. Thank you.

Mr. Nielsen, go ahead.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for your presentation this morning. I appreciate all the work that the United Church does for our communities year in and year out. I guess my question is around the legislation. Maybe you can explain a little bit about why you have to go through the process of changing both federal and provincial legislation throughout the country.

Reverend Blair: If I may invite Ms Keachie to respond to that.

Ms Keachie: Sure. Happy to. Thank you, and good morning to the committee. It's great to be here. The federal legislation from 1925 was what actually incorporated the United Church. We understand that at the time there was consideration as to sort of what further

had to happen. We had the federal legislation that incorporates the United Church body out of the three union churches that formed it, but because of the way that the provinces maintain jurisdiction over property and civil rights, particularly property rights here, provincial legislation needed to be enacted in each of the provinces, which essentially reproduced much of the federal legislation but included specifically how it would be that congregations would hold property through their trustees.

So when the United Church began to undertake this restructuring process, in addition to the democratic process that they undertook, which Reverend Blair just explained in terms of assuring itself that the full United Church, down to the congregational level, was in favour of this change, the other consideration that the United Church undertook was of a legal nature in terms of what changes needed to get made. When the church looked at the various pieces of legislation across the country, we considered it to be insufficient to reflect the changes in the United Church to not make these changes. The federal legislation was approached first. The amendment that we made there effects the same kinds of changes that we're asking for in the provincial legislation. If we don't enact the provincial legislation changes, there will be a disconnect between the actual governance structure of the United Church and this legislation, this governing legislation that the United Church, specifically in respect to how it holds property, will be subject to or continues to be subject to in the various provinces.

9:20

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen, go ahead.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Just a quick follow-up. I guess, is this unique to the United Church, or do you know of other churches that have had to maybe go through similar processes?

Ms Keachie: That is a good question. I don't know of other churches who have gone through similar processes. I know of other bodies that are incorporated by a private act who have had to go to the Legislature when they need a particular change in the act. Not many churches, as far as I understand, are structured in the same way as the United Church. That's one of the particularities of the United Church, being so tied to the Canadian polity to a certain extent. It was the Canadian denomination for many years, so the structure of the United Church perhaps got woven into the political structure of Canada. I don't know of other churches. I do know of other corporations incorporated by private acts that have had to seek amendments with their various Legislative Assemblies.

The Chair: Thank you.

At this time I'll just open up the floor to any other committee members who may have questions. I don't have anybody on the list at this time. Hearing and seeing none. Okay.

I'd like to thank our guests. Thank you so much for being here. Thank you for your presentation. Thank you for answering questions. We're next going to move on to the deliberations. You're certainly welcome to stay online and listen to deliberations; however, if the committee does go in camera, unfortunately, we're just going to have to disconnect at that particular point. But thank you so much.

Hon. members, at this time the committee will begin its deliberations on Bill Pr. 2, as mentioned earlier. The committee must ultimately decide whether the bill should proceed, proceed with amendments, or not proceed. I'll open up the floor to discussion by the committee or recommendations or suggestions for a possible motion.

Okay. Mr. Nielsen, I don't want to read your mind, but do you have a suggestion that the bill proceed or not proceed?

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. We've certainly seen these kinds of changes where organizations, I guess, whatever the policies were of the day, got kind of caught up in legislation and having to make those changes by coming back through the necessary Assemblies, so it's not unheard of. Just another case here, so I don't see why this should not proceed, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to make a motion that the committee recommend it proceed in the House.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. I'll put that motion up, and I know Mr. Schow probably wants to supplement what you're saying here. Mr. Nielsen will move that the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills recommend that Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021, proceed. Sound about right? There we go. Thank you very much.

Mr. Schow, go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I tend to concur with Mr. Nielsen. This looks like a bill that a lot of work has gone into, and I appreciate the work also done by Parliamentary Counsel. I, too, concur that this bill should proceed.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Are there any other comments or questions by committee members?

Hearing and seeing none – I'm noticing from the clerk we're having a little bit of technical difficulties getting the question up on the screen. However, I think I'll just read it again, and then we can make a vote on this. Mr. Nielsen will move that

the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills recommend that Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021, proceed.

All those in favour, say aye. On videoconference? Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none,

that motion is carried.

Thank you very much, and thank you again to our guests for being here today.

Reverend Blair: Thank you very much. Bye.

Ms Keachie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much. Bye.

Okay. Hon. members, with the committee having finished its deliberations on Bill Pr. 2, the committee should now consider directing research services to prepare a draft report including the committee's recommendations. Would a member wish to move a motion that directs research services to prepare the committee's draft report?

Mr. Schow: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Schow will move that the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills direct research services to prepare a draft report on the committee's review of Bill Pr. 2, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, 2021, which includes the committee's recommendations and (b) authorize the chair to approve the committee's final report to the Assembly on or before noon . . .

I think the date might change on that. This is to approve the committee's final report? Okay. We should be good with that. I'll just repeat that (b) again: authorize the chair to approve the committee's final report to the Assembly on or before noon

. . . on Wednesday, May 5, 2021.

Any questions, comments? No?

Hearing and seeing none, all those in favour, say aye. On videoconference? Thank you. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none. Okay.

That motion is carried.

Okay. Members, ladies and gentlemen, before we proceed to the next item on our agenda, we still have a little bit of time here, so we're just going to take a 10-minute break before we get to our next series of guests. We'll get the clock started. We'll take a 10-minute break, ladies and gentlemen, and then we will return.

Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned from 9:27 a.m. to 9:37 a.m.]

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

Members, ladies and gentlemen, we're going to go to the review of Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act.

Hon. members, at our meeting on April 20 the committee agreed to invite stakeholders to provide oral presentations on Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act. According to the committee's agreed-upon process stakeholders may make presentations of up to five minutes, followed by questions from committee members for up to 15 minutes.

Both caucuses could invite up to three stakeholders. Stakeholder lists were to be submitted to the chair by noon on Wednesday, April 21. For the record the opposition caucus requested to hear from Mr. Greg Rehman, president of the Edmonton Firefighters' Union, and Mr. Brad Readman, president of the Alberta Fire Fighters Association. The government caucus requested to hear from Mr. Peter Krich, fire chief, city of Camrose fire department; Mr. Ross Penner, fire chief, Camrose county volunteer fire department; Mr. Fred Tyrell, executive director of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association.

I have two notes to pass along to members about today's presentation. Mr. Tyrell was unable to present. However, Mr. Drayton Bussiere, fire chief with the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, has agreed to present for him. Second, Mr. Penner was also unable to present today, but he has submitted a letter to the committee expressing his position on Bill 216, which has been posted to the committee's internal website.

Okay. Now we'll begin with a presentation. First we have Mr. Krich. Thank you for agreeing to present to the committee. I think you should be online. Are you online at the moment? Okay. Sir, thank you very much for being here today. You'll have up to five minutes to present to our committee, and we'll have a series of questions to follow after that. So thank you very much, sir, and welcome to the committee. The floor is yours.

Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act

Mr. Krich: Okay. Thank you very much. Can everybody hear me okay? I guess I'm on. Just a little background. My name is Peter Krich. I'm fire chief with the city of Camrose. I'm actually a 40-year member here now with the city of Camrose. I started out as a volunteer firefighter and worked up through the ranks. I've been the fire chief here for the city now for the last 20 years. I also was the past president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association. I now sit as the chair of the National Advisory Council for the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm here, again, to support MLA Lovely's Bill 216, the Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act, understanding that fire prevention is an important tool that is used by the fire service right across our country and world-wide in order to get public awareness about fire safety and fire prevention through education. We also understand that this is not just a one-week effort. This is something that is recognized year-round. We try to promote and educate our fire services and our communities across our country.

Fire Prevention Week is observed usually during the week of October 9. This is a tradition that's been there for many, many years, and it's something that's been commemorative of the Great Chicago Fire, that happened on October 8, 1871. This is what started fire prevention and education. It came out of the National Fire Protection Association, and then there was that whole recognition of understanding what the fire service is trying to accomplish in educating people, trying to be safe, and how we can be out there.

My message is that having our province and the Alberta government support a week of recognition, coming directly from our province, is key to helping support the fire services in our province, sending that message not just from us as an internal fire department or our fire services trying to get the message out. The actual government backing is there to say that this is an important message. We've been working with the fire service and with our community for many, many years on education and awareness, and we find that the more we educate, the more that we make people aware of the hazards that are out there, the potentials that are out there, the fewer fires we should have. That's the goal. As I've always said, we want to be proactive in firefighting rather than reactive. We will always be reactive because there will always be the times that we will have to react to the fires, but if we put more emphasis and more messaging on being proactive, on how to prevent and educate and how to stop the fires before they start, the better off we'll be. That's number one on that aspect of getting that message out clearly, how important it is for the fire service.

The second message is the fire services recognition day. There's a lot of recognition that goes to the fire service, and I just want to make it clear that we already do recognize the fire service in a number of ways as well. There's an International Firefighters' Day, which is actually tomorrow, May 4. This is a tradition that some fire departments will join in on. Some others won't follow through. It goes back in history from Europe and St. Florian and supporting the fire service, but a lot of it was to do mostly with the recognition of those that have passed and what they've done for the service.

The other one that's out there – and I know the federal government has just released that aspect – is Firefighters' National Memorial Day. That's the second Sunday in September, which is recognized federally. But that, again, is a memorial service. It's not a true fire services recognition. I think that where MLA Lovely's bill is going is on the aspect of fire services recognition. I think that what we need to look at is if we can make sure that people understand what is actually going on in our province in fire protection and what we're actually doing out there and who's actually doing it and recognizing those individuals for their efforts and their time and their commitments. We have to really, truly understand that the majority of the province is protected by volunteer firefighters, and when we say "volunteer firefighters," these are not career firefighters. These are not firefighters where, actually, this is their job. This is what they're helping to do to protect their communities.

So what the recognition would be is a lot of service recognition, not from those individuals . . . [A timer sounded] There goes my time.

The Chair: That's okay. You can finish your last thought if you'd like.

Mr. Krich: Yeah. The more recognition we can get out to the fire service at the volunteer level – on their dedication, their commitment, their time in, the dedication and commitment from their employers to allow them to do the service – I think that's the recognition that needs to be looked at, how we can recognize those services being provided by the use of volunteer firefighters.

9:45

The Chair: Fantastic. Thank you very much, sir, for the presentation.

Mr. Krich: You're welcome.

The Chair: We'll go to a series of questions, of course, from our committee members. This is a government member guest, so we'll go to the Official Opposition. Is it Member Irwin? Good. Okay. Member Irwin, go ahead, please.

Thank you.

Member Irwin: Sure. Thank you. Oh, I just realized I'm in a sunbeam here. Thanks so much for your service and for your many years of work. I actually lived in Camrose myself for about five years, when I taught in Bawlf, so I have very good memories of my time living there.

I just wanted to ask, you know: can you just tell us about any challenges specific around, let's say, like, municipal funding, any local issues in the Camrose area that might be useful for us as MLAs to know? We know we've heard from a lot of folks, folks who work at the municipal level, that funding around municipalities has been an issue. I'm just curious if there are any issues that you see from your position as fire chief.

Mr. Krich: Yeah. Thank you for the question. Again, yeah, there's always the question of the financial support in trying to manage a service, and I guess that is one of the challenges that we have when we're running a volunteer-type fire service and then transition into career. To be able to provide the service: it's always funding and the cost of that. It's a balance that we have to strike to meet the needs of the community as well as being financially stable with that. We are constantly seeing challenges on that aspect, only on the aspect that it's the volunteers, that it's more challenging to get volunteers to be able to do the job and on a day-to-day basis.

The Chair: Member Irwin, do you have a follow-up, please?

Member Irwin: No follow-up. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Member Glasgow, go ahead, please.

Ms Glasgow: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Krich, for your presentation. I just wanted, first of all, to say thank you for your service. Over 40 years is definitely very commendable. I know that servicemen and -women, no matter what uniform they wear, definitely should be recognized as the work that you do for your community is very notable. I just wanted to say that I really appreciate your perspective, saying that you are the past president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs as well as that you're on the national council. Those are some pretty big accomplishments, especially for someone who started as a volunteer. I just want to say thanks for volunteering as well.

I know that I represent Brooks-Medicine Hat, which is largely rural, and most of my constituency is covered by the Cypress county and the county of Newell fire departments, which are mostly volunteer firefighters, so we owe a debt of gratitude to those people who answer the call and turn on those lights at whatever time of day it is. I know that the last time I was coming home from Edmonton, there was a bunch of volunteer firefighters attending to a fire near the railroad tracks. We're really lucky to have you guys. We see you all the time, every day, doing your work. The men and women who are involved in fire services, whether they're volunteer or paid, are super important.

You've touched on this recognition day and fire prevention as being the two biggest reasons that you're supporting MLA Lovely's bill. What do you think? If you could get any message out to Albertans about fire prevention, especially in this dry season right now – I know that it rained in Medicine Hat yesterday, which is, like, the weirdest thing ever because that just about never happens. It rained down here yesterday, which is great for our farmers and for the ducks, I guess. I'm just wondering: if you could get out anything about fire prevention, because we know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and what you want to see done with fire prevention in Alberta, what would that be?

Mr. Krich: Well, I think it's like anything. The more the message, the more you get. I think that if we announce more and get the community aware of what's happening – we're constantly educating. We're trying to get onto the radios. We're trying to get into the community. Yes, we are in a dry season right now. We hear from Wildfire, we hear from the forestry industry, but we don't hear too much what's going on in our communities and what's around in surrounding areas. We've been busy around Camrose and in our district here for the fire service because of the grass fires. It's bone dry out there, and people don't realize that it just takes one little spark to set off these grass fires to a magnitude that when the wind picks up, it's gone. People just don't understand that, and I think that's what education is all about. A cigarette butt thrown out the window while going down the highway: we're setting in motion to fight fire. People just don't realize it's going on. We had eight miles of fire going down the highway yesterday from a spark from a tire. That's how fast and easy this thing can spread.

So messaging is key to this whole concept of fire prevention. If we get our messaging out, if the government gets messaging out, if everybody can get the message out, the more people that hear and the more people that know, the better off everyone will be.

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

Ms Glasgo: I do, Mr. Chair, if that's okay.

The Chair: Okay. Yeah.

Ms Glasgo: Okay. My question is, then, that you mentioned grass fires, and I had mentioned grass fires before as well. I know the county of Newell just put out a fire restriction this morning. It's super dry out there as well, as it is across the province. It's that time of year.

When we're talking about grass fires, usually those are responded to by volunteer firefighters. You talked about the recognition day, and I know that down here we lost a very wonderful rancher and conservationist in Mr. James Hargrave during a tragic wildfire. I think that what is not noted across the province is just how much risk these volunteer firefighters go into every day. So when we're saying thank you for their service, I guess my question is: what can we be doing to better support volunteer firefighters? What could we be talking about on this day? How do you envision a recognition day really going to celebrate the work of those volunteer firefighters, who really put it all on the line when they go out to these completely unpredictable events?

Mr. Krich: Well, thank you for that. Yes, I understand the tragedy that happened there. I was at the funeral of James there, and they are not good things.

As I'd mentioned before, a lot of the recognition that's out there is all in recognition of the past or people dying. I think we have to get away from that recognition – not get away from it but put more emphasis on what, truly, the volunteer firefighter is actually doing

there and recognizing them and thanking them for what they do. They're taking time away from their jobs. They're taking time away from their families. They're taking time to do what they need to do to save your lives, your property, your communities in times of need. People just don't truly understand that, and I've always said that they don't really know who we are, what we are, and what we actually do and who these individuals are, where they're coming from, what their lives are.

These are not career firefighters. These are just people in communities. They're just like you and I or anybody. It's like yourselves. They could be one of you. The community doesn't know that, so I think the recognition needs to go out to them and not just to them but to their employers that are employing these firefighters to allow them to go. That's more where the emphasis of the recognition should go.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much.

I don't have an opposition – oh, Mr. Nielsen, go ahead, then followed by Mr. Getson. Go ahead.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Chief, thank you for your presentation, but more importantly than that, thank you to you and all of your teams that work so hard each and every day to keep Albertans safe. It is so greatly appreciated. One of the things that I've had the opportunity a couple of times now here in the Edmonton area with the Edmonton fire service is to participate in the fire ops 101 to kind of get a bit of an understanding of what firefighters do. I still don't think I understand what's going on, but I know one of the small components of it that's so important is response time. Literally a minute can make a huge difference once arriving on scene, so I'm wondering what you're hearing from your teams, people in your area about 911 dispatch. How important is that for an area like yours?

Mr. Krich: Well, 911 dispatching is the key, right? The sooner the message gets to us, the sooner we can get there, and 911s are centres that are a need, and they have to be there, and they have to be ready to go. That's one component, then, just that messaging of transferring it to the fire service, understanding that the fire service is not always going to be readily available and at that spur of the moment, only because the types of services that are being provided in our province are not that career fire department that's sitting at the station ready to go or that are in the truck with a crew and ready to roll and they can get there within that four- or five-minute time frame, whatever the time is at that.

In rural Alberta those communities are smaller. They're spread apart. They're operated differently, and that's where, from a volunteer point of view and a volunteer fire service type point of view, response time becomes a factor because now the volunteer is either coming from home once they get the call, and then they have to go to the station or go to the fire. There's a little bit more lag time of getting to that because we don't have people sitting at a fire station in rural Alberta waiting for fire calls or manning a truck 24/7. That has to be looked at, the aspect on that. But we truly understand that every second, every minute counts. The sooner we get there, the sooner, faster we can respond, the better it is.

9:55

It's also having the ability to have the staffing available. That's becoming more and more of a challenge in rural Alberta because of the volunteer firefighters and their time and commitment and dedication. That comes back to the recognition and saying that in order to keep these people, we need that. That's another aspect of the response, having those people available.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen, go ahead.

Mr. Nielsen: Just a quick follow-up. I guess that when we're talking about the dispatch, then, with each local community, you know, if we're going to recognize, if we're going to listen to all of you on how best to prevent fires and things like that, should we also be listening if we're hearing from local communities that they want dispatching specific to their areas? Is that something as MLAs that we need to be listening very carefully to?

Mr. Krich: Well, that's correct. I think every area has its dispatching capabilities, and where it's managed and where it's being communicated from is being done very well. Again, making sure the message is getting there, the sooner the quicker, should be in every community. Yes.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Getson, go ahead, please.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Chief, thank you so much for your time. I didn't realize they took volunteers about the age of 10 years old. You were saying that you've been in this for 40 years, so that's a revelation.

Mr. Krich: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Getson: With that, though, in all seriousness, I appreciate what you do and others do. Most of us are wired to run away from it; you guys are wired to run into harm's way to help prevent it, so hats off to you for doing that. To my brother as well: I'm going to give him a little bit of a tribute. He did something similar. He became a volunteer firefighter up in Williams Lake when the fires were going through there. Now he's in the mine rescue side of it and just loves it.

With that, I know that the Camrose model is a little bit different, where you have a hybrid model. Can you explain how that works with the integration between regular services and then the volunteer group and how you integrate and train on that, sir?

Mr. Krich: Okay. Yeah, when you say "hybrid," hybrid is kind of a strange word for us. It's more of a composite fire department, where we do have full-time staffing and we have paid on-call or volunteer firefighters. Camrose has always been a composite-type department. A lot of fire departments in rural Alberta will transition into a composite type, where they'll start out as strictly volunteers and there's nobody being paid to do the job. They're just there to support the community. Then they'll transition into what we call our composite, which Camrose is right now, on the aspect of – I have four full-time staff. They're not four full-time firefighters. I have myself, the chief, and I have a deputy and I have a full-time fire prevention guy and I have a full-time fire inspector, which do all their Monday to Friday daytime work in focusing on fire prevention and education and awareness. That's the emphasis on that. The rest of the service is being provided by volunteer firefighters. Those are the paid on-calls. Those are the guys that have other jobs, and they get called. Those are the ones fighting the fire in Camrose. We do respond during daytime hours with the four of us that are full-time staff.

Training is integrated. We all train together. We all work together. It works very well. That has to work that way, and that's the only way you can. You've got to be able to be a team, and the fire service is that team. We create that atmosphere and create that environment that everybody does the same no matter who you are within the service. When you talk about the composite-type departments, there are a lot of departments out there that will be running full-time staffing as well as paid on-call volunteers. But the majority of the firefighting force is run by volunteers.

The Chair: Mr. Getson, we have less than a minute. Do you have a quick question?

Mr. Getson: Yeah, just a quick follow-up. Thank you, then. With MLA Lovely bringing this recognition forward, Chief, ideally, if you were speaking to someone who's on the bench about becoming a volunteer, what would you have to say to them? What are some of the challenges and the rewards that come along with this, to pitch in and help out in their communities?

Mr. Krich: Well, there are more rewards than there are challenges. That's what I like to say. When you join into the world of the fire service – again, I've been 40 years in here, and I've loved every year of it. I think anybody getting into it is going to get a very rewardable – achieving a career or a life change in their lifestyle of what they're trying to accomplish for their communities, for themselves. The challenge is that what we do and how we do it and what is expected, between training, education, awareness, and availability . . .

The Chair: Thank you. Chief, thank you very much for your presentation. Thank you for answering questions from our committee members. It's very much and greatly appreciated.

Mr. Krich: Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Yeah.

Next we're going to go to Mr. Greg Rehman, president of the Edmonton Fire Fighters' Union. Sir, yep, you're onscreen. Fantastic. Sir, you're going to have up to five minutes to make a presentation, followed by up to 15 minutes of questions from our committee members. The floor is yours, sir.

Thank you.

Mr. Rehman: Can you guys hear me okay?

The Chair: We can.

Mr. Rehman: Okay. Good morning and thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on Bill 216. Again, my name is Greg Rehman, and I'm the president of the Edmonton Fire Fighters' Union, that represents about 1,300 uniformed members, who each play a key role in ensuring the fire services' mission, protecting the lives, property, and environment of those within the community which we serve. Our members work on the front line. We have firefighters, fire prevention officers, fire investigators, emergency communication dispatchers, and they're all supported by our training instructors, logistics officers, and fire apparatus technicians, who all fulfill the duties and roles that help protect the citizens of Edmonton.

You know, firefighters are humble people. We don't typically seek to be recognized for doing our jobs, but Edmonton firefighters are nevertheless grateful for recognition of valuable contributions and sacrifices regularly made by individuals who deliver fire services to their communities. We'd like to offer a thank you to Ms Lovely for tabling this bill.

Support from all levels of government, which is something of utmost importance to our members in Edmonton fire: in 2018 the federal government initiated the memorial grant program, and subsequently in 2020 the government of Alberta established the Heroes' Compensation Act. Both of these programs recognize the services and sacrifices given by first responders who've died as a result of their duties, all while providing support to the grieving families. These initiatives are invaluable to firefighters and their families during a time of need and provide a sense of reassurance to those on the front line. Again, by the way, Mr. Krich has said as

well that it's important that we recognize the people and the sacrifice they give. Obviously, a day of recognition is to go away and do more of a, I guess, recognition on a positive note.

Again, the government of Alberta has been a leader in North America through the introduction of presumptive legislation for firefighter occupational illness. Again, first in 2003 there were seven presumptive cancers that were initiated, and to date now we have up to 16, with the minimum latency periods for those. In 2018 both cervical and ovarian cancers were added to the coverage list, recognizing the diverse and inclusive nature of the fire service. Further to the cancer coverage, in 2012 the government also introduced, in the Workers' Compensation Act, allowing first responders, which includes firefighters and emergency dispatchers, presumptive coverage for posttraumatic stress injuries. Alberta was the first province in Canada to introduce such coverage. They would again like to thank you for the continued support.

Fire service is unique compared to many other public-sector programs in that there are industry standards based on scientific research and best practices, utilizing data for comparative analytics in order to strive for industry standards such as NFPA. It is imperative for the future of the fire service as well as for the safety of both the firefighters and public to recognize these standards.

While fire services recognition day is both important and welcomed, those in the fire services need to be supported on a year-round basis, similar to a fire crew being available for public service for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Continued support of our WCB coverage, recognition of priority vaccination, inclusion of firefighters' safety in the building codes, and proper staffing deployment are a few examples of continued support for firefighters in all of our communities on the days surrounding this day of recognition.

Again, thank you for allowing me to speak on this bill. The Edmonton Fire Fighters' Union and its members appreciate the recognition of the work that we and all of the surrounding communities do to keep our communities safe and continued support from our elected officials.

The Chair: Great. Well, thank you very much, sir, and thank you for your presentation.

This is a guest provided to us by the opposition, so we will go to the government members – okay; Mr. Amery – for a question. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Amery: Good morning and thank you very much for your presentation. Thank you to all of you for coming here this morning to speak a little bit about MLA Lovely's proposal. Thank you for the background and the history that you provided, sir, especially with a little bit of a discussion about how Alberta has been leading in many areas. I'm certainly pleased to see that Alberta is taking great strides, if you will, in terms of coverage for firefighters. We know that the role that you play and the entire firefighter community plays in our province is absolutely essential.

10:05

My question is a little bit broad, but I'd like to give you the opportunity to help the committee members and then all of the members of the Legislature understand a little bit about some of the challenges that firefighters are dealing with in this province that have not yet been addressed. You talked a little bit about expanded coverage for cancer treatment; you talked about Alberta being a leader in North America and some of the things that they've done. But I know that there's always more work to be done, and I'm wondering if you could provide a little bit of expansion on what you foresee coming up in the next five or 10 years as challenges for the firefighting community.

Mr. Rehman: Thank you for the question. Yeah. Again, I think that with the evolving of the pandemic we're currently in, the challenge of all services across Alberta is to maintain our staffing levels in order to protect our citizens that we're here to protect. You know, I think that's – probably one of the things we've been lobbying for years with the federal government on is that priority vaccination when it comes to pandemics such as SARS and now COVID-19. Again, the early recognition of that and the vaccination for our members help keep us safe and keep us healthy and keep us at work. Again, I know that COVID-19 – you know, we're over a year into it, and it's going to keep evolving, and there are going to be other pandemics that come down the road. We know that for sure. But I think that as we go forward, in order to kind of ensure the safety of all communities – you just heard from Mr. Krich – you know, especially the rural ones, when they have smaller numbers to draw from, we need to make sure that all of our firefighters have the vaccination and protection needed in order to go forward and protect our communities.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Chair. This a great point that you bring up, Mr. Rehman, because the need and, I think, the desire to vaccinate our firefighting community are absolutely essential, so I'm glad that you brought that up, and I hope that members of the committee hear that and hear it well.

Thank you very much. I will yield my time, Mr. Chair, to the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

We'll go to Mr. Nielsen. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Greg, again, thanks for presenting to the committee. Obviously, thank you to you and all of our Edmonton firefighters for what you do every day. If I may, just a special shout-out to stations 14 and 25, which keep the residents of Edmonton-Decore very, very safe each and every day.

I guess, obviously, with this bill coming forward, there's a policy outcome that will recognize the work of fire services and further promote the education of fire prevention, so my hope is that if this bill passes, that day will provide, basically, an opportunity for firefighters to be recognized and, with that, sort of a greater level of listening to our firefighters and what they need each and every day to perform their jobs. I guess, with that, I'd like to ask: what do you envision this day looking like? What should accompany this kind of symbolic gesture so that, you know, firefighters can do their work to the best of their abilities?

Mr. Rehman: That's a tough question to ask a firefighter, how to be recognized – like I said before, we're very humble – again, to say: how do I envision the day occurring or what it should entail? Again, I know the Fire Prevention Week kind of encompasses this day, so along with fire prevention and the need to educate the public on the safety things that they can do within their own homes – i.e., their smoke detectors – or whether it comes with, you know, a smart program for wildland fires, there are all sorts of different educational things that'll be encompassed in that week.

As far as a recognition day goes, again, I think that rather than putting the emphasis on the firefighters and giving a pat on the back, the public could maybe become more aware of our roles and responsibilities and how we need the support, again, all year long through elected officials to make sure that we have the proper funding, staffing in order to respond to the needs of our citizens. You know, we're seeing now, with the pandemic here, that our services haven't decreased; they're actually, well, I would say,

maintaining and becoming more difficult. But I think just that education to the public: when they see a fire truck pull up on scene for a medical call or for a fire call or whether it be our fire prevention staff doing inspections, just the roles that they play in the community help us keep them safe every day.

The Chair: And a follow-up, please.

Mr. Nielsen: A quick follow-up. Yeah. We've seen some other private members' bills coming forward, recognizing either special days or, you know, certain things, with also some other overarching kind of policy requests out of those, I guess, like, say, for instance, some kind of reporting framework. With the education component of it, is there anything that firefighters would like to see in terms of maybe a policy commitment from legislators? Are we hitting targets in terms of the type of education that we're getting out there, and are we getting the necessary response back from Albertans to help you to prevent fires?

Mr. Rehman: Yes. I think that would be more to the fire statistics office and that. I believe, you know, we've been pushing federally to kind of have those statistics offices across Canada to identify trends when it comes to fire prevention and that and safety to the public. Again, I think that's probably one of the things – whether it be for fire prevention or for, I guess, fire deaths or how fires are occurring, when they're occurring, the demographics of when they're occurring, those are all important things to help us focus our fire prevention efforts in order to target those high-risk areas. I know some of that work is being done, but I think that federally if we could have some kind of a collection area where each province is responsible for reporting to that – but it has to be a common, I guess, language used across the country and within the province itself for it to identify those trends.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rutherford, you're next up. Go ahead.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the presentation as well as your service. I did 10 years in law enforcement, and I only bring that up because I was able to see very closely the work of firefighters and the risk that is taken and the level of professionalism that is brought to all of the calls and situations that the fire department responds to. It's impressive to see, you know, a group of men and women come together to work very well in unison and to really risk their lives in order to save both people and property as well.

Some of the things that have been touched on, you know, such as the heroes fund: these are important aspects that can help just reduce that stress that could still exist and will exist, frankly, based on the risk that is taken and the outcomes that are possible each day, where there will be some help for the families as well.

As I sort of talk broadly about this, I know we've gone over several different aspects. You've brought up the pandemic, the vaccination, the priority. I'm aware of the work that the firefighters do with patients and people directly and closely in a variety of different ways, and that needs to be recognized.

I guess, given your role in Edmonton could you go through sort of common themes of things that you're hearing coming from your members? As we look to talk about fire prevention and fire awareness and the recognition of service, it's important to be able to educate one another. You know, I've got very young kids who will start getting education on fire and the dangers and what to do in case of these kinds of events. But just sort of broadly speaking, the concerns coming in or just the overall themes, I guess, that

you're hearing that we should be aware of, if there's anything to add to that, it would be good to know.

Thank you.

Mr. Rehman: Again, I think that probably, you know, when it comes to our members, they're a dedicated group of men and women, and I just mentioned before that they cover all the way from dispatch to prevention to investigations and logistics and then, obviously, our firefighters as well. I mean, the overall, I guess, concern is, obviously, you know, that COVID has put a tightening of budgets in place, and they've had to readjust budgets and look into further adjustments.

10:15

Again, the concern from our members is that as the city continues to grow and will continue to grow, we don't get spread out too thin. It's not about a fear of layoffs or anything else; it's about that fear of not having proper staffing on scene for large calls and instances. It comes back to their own safety, but, number one, they're actually more concerned about the public safety. We even see house fires now where it's not a single house fire; it spreads to three, four, or five houses quite rapidly even though we have a very robust response time. It's making sure that, you know, when they show up at a fire, they know that backup or support is going to be there for them but also that they can get into that fire and help the citizens out and make sure that they're safe as well. Again, I think that's probably the biggest thing, to make sure that we're not going backwards but that we're maintaining and continuing to kind of try and match both as best as possible.

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

Mr. Rutherford: Chair, I don't have one.

Again, thank you for being here with us today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Member Lori Sigurdson. Go ahead, please.

Ms Sigurdson: Good morning. Thank you so much, Mr. Rehman, for your presentation today, and certainly thank you for your service and for all the members of your union for the important work that you do. Of course, I just want to also acknowledge you for your union leadership. We know that in jurisdictions where there is a significant union presence, then there are improved working conditions for all workers. It's kind of the lighthouse effect, we know, which probably you know about. I just appreciate you standing for workers throughout our province, really.

We know – and it's probably an understatement of a great magnitude – that firefighting is stressful work, so, you know, people's mental health is affected. I'm the critic for mental health and addictions, so that's kind of where I want to go because I want to talk about what kind of real support firefighters need. If you had a number one ask in the area of mental health, like, what would you say that your members need?

Mr. Rehman: Again, continued support. You know, again, we have the posttraumatic stress injury legislation already. That helps. Number one, that takes that burden of proof off our members so that they can get the help right away. So that's number one, continuing that support.

Again, we have a very good peer support team here in Edmonton through our mental health group, and we have a chaplain with the city of Edmonton. I think that our members, when they do come across stresses or difficult times, have a pretty robust number of people to draw from. We call it peer support because it's other

firefighters, dispatchers, et cetera, that are on this team, and it's easier to talk to your own peers.

It's just making sure that we have the proper funding internally and across the province to make sure that our members are able to get the help through counselling and other things as well. Again, I think it's just making sure that, you know, that stigma is removed, people are willing to come forward, and when they do come forward, it's recognized and they get the support they need.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member. Yeah.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. Yeah. You referred to that presumptive coverage, so, yeah, the burden isn't on the firefighter themselves to, you know, get a whole bunch of assessments and prove it. That's understood, that this kind of work – of course, they shouldn't have a delay in that.

Are there other things with WCB that you feel could be upped, could be improved so that your members get the support they need?

Mr. Rehman: Yeah. I think, again, you know, the presumptive for cancers is always evolving. It started in 2003, and we added, I believe, 10 in 2018, so always revisiting the science behind the cancers. There are a number of different ones that are starting to become more prevalent now. We've had a lot of members here in Edmonton alone that passed away in the last few years from pancreatic cancer. It costs Alberta as well.

Just continue to evaluate and . . .

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Rehman, for your presentation and answering questions from our committee members.

Members, we are now going to move on to our next guest. We'll now hear from Mr. Bussiere. Sir, thank you very much for being here. You can have up to five minutes to make your presentation, followed by 15 minutes' worth of questions from our committee members. Sir, it looks like you're ready. The floor is yours.

Mr. Bussiere: Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning, everybody. I'll introduce myself first. I'm the fire chief and director of emergency management for Lacombe county, and I'm also here to speak to you today as the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association director at large for rural fire services. I'm also the current sitting recruitment and retention committee chair for the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association. I just want to thank you, first off, for having me here today and thank MLA Lovely for the bill that's being discussed this morning.

Fire Prevention Week is an important part of fire safety for many communities. For many of the communities that I represent as the director at large for rural fire services, Fire Prevention Week is one of the primary if not the only opportunity that many fully volunteer fire services in our small communities have to really engage their residents and their communities abroad to talk about fire prevention and fire safety. It's a really important tool that we're using in this bill. It really helps to reinforce that importance of positive public interaction.

The other piece from the recruitment and retention side that I want to speak about with the fire services recognition day is that anything we as fire chiefs and recruitment officers can do to show our potential members that there is some recognition, some broader recognition beyond their own communities for the hard work that they do and the really significant amount of time that they put in to do that work, is a good thing, in our minds. So we really appreciate

the spirit of the bill and the recognition that it will provide to our members.

I don't want to be too repetitive from the other two presenters, so I'll keep my presentation fairly short in saying that firefighters all across the province are doing really good work for their communities all the time. And anything we can do to tell them that we appreciate that and to recognize the work they're doing is a positive thing. As I said, any reinforcement of the positive public interaction that comes from Fire Prevention Week and the presentations and the hall tours and all of the different things that go along with that is a really, really good thing for the fire service and the safety of all the communities that our firefighters serve.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, sir. Thank you for the presentation.

We'll go to the Official Opposition. Mr. Nielsen, we'll start with you, please.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Chair. Of course, again, Chief, thank you for presenting to committee and everything you do each and every day. Please extend our thanks to all of your teams as well. I can't imagine what it would be like to not have them there. As I think one of the members said earlier: while we're all running away, you're running towards it. Thank you for that.

I'm glad you kind of touched on some of the different areas that you're responsible for. There's a lot of knowledge base there to be able to tap into. I guess I'm wondering if you're hearing any kind of common themes for advocacy across the province. Obviously, the bill wants to make a recognition day for firefighters and increase the level of education around fire prevention. What other aspects could this bill maybe, potentially provide in terms of opportunities to hear from firefighters so that legislators like us can make those changes that will make your jobs easier to do?

Mr. Bussiere: Definitely. I think one of the biggest things that we, as the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, advocate for regularly is that becoming a firefighter, especially as a paid on-call or volunteer firefighter, really is more than just a hobby. It really truly is a lifestyle. It's a lot of time and commitment and work, families left at restaurants and dates left at the movies, those types of things. We really try to advocate so that people know that. I think our prospective members need to know that, but also the broader community needs to know that, just so that when they say they're recognizing or supporting fire departments and fire members, they really truly know what that means.

10:25

The Chair: A follow-up, please.

Mr. Nielsen: Yes, please, Chair. Hopefully, I'm not making an assumption. Hopefully, you have got probably a pretty good pulse in terms of how firefighters are doing across the province. How is that? Like, I guess, is recruitment stable? Does there need to be more investment in that? You know, how does the future look? As legislators, again, how can we help you?

Mr. Bussiere: I think that holistically across the province, recruitment has always been one of our biggest challenges, especially for paid on-call and volunteer fire departments, and I don't think that that has changed. I think we see ebbs and flows in recruitment based on how well our economy is doing. If lots of people are looking for work and moving around to find that work, then fire departments suffer as a result in terms of members moving away for their full-time jobs and those types of things. We definitely see that.

As far as how legislators can help, that's a difficult question to answer, I think, and rather than give you an off-the-cuff answer, I think I'd like to think that one through a little bit. But I really do think that we see across the province that recruitment is an issue and in some areas worse than others. That's something that we really try to be cognizant of and make sure that we're just constantly communicating. I think things like this and just anything we can do to make sure that the fire department stays top of mind for people is a good step forward for us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. R.J. Sigurdson, go ahead, please, sir.

Mr. Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Chief Bussiere, for your presentation and being here today to speak to this issue, which is I think one of great importance. I'd also like to acknowledge all the hard work you yourself and all firefighters do in protecting our communities across the province every single day. You know, personally myself I have two very close friends, one that works for Okotoks fire, who just got hired on full-time, and then a friend who works as a volunteer as well. I've had the opportunity to have some great in-depth conversations with them, and we talk about the education piece and just the awareness of trying to express to people what firefighters actually do every day. It's not just fighting fires. It's so much more, so much more than just that.

I guess one of the principal pieces that they say is very important, both in rural communities that have a lot of trees around homes to local communities, is when we talk about fire prevention. I guess, do you mind speaking just a little bit to how this bill will help in educating communities? I know you do so much hard work on this already but, you know, how this might help in being able to broaden that education piece, which I think is incredibly important to preventing fires.

Mr. Bussiere: Sure. I think that any opportunity we have in the fire service to talk about fire safety is a good one, and one of the things that we can do during Fire Prevention Week, because we have an extended amount of time that week that's really focused on news media and those types of things to talk about it, is exactly that: we can broaden the topics.

One thing for rural communities, for example, that doesn't necessarily get talked about a lot is the risk of agricultural fires. It's important for us as fire chiefs and firefighters while we're doing these types of things during Fire Prevention Week to make sure we know those key issues and know our communities in such a way that we can talk about relevant hazards. Fire Prevention Week is something where we generally have a topic of the year that we talk about, and it does seem to be kitchen fires and those types of things quite regularly, which are a large cause of fires, but it's important for us to remember to educate everybody that there are lots of different types of fires and different ways that they're caused and safe burning practices, FireSmart principles on rural properties, those types of things.

The Chair: Okay. A follow-up, please.

Mr. Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you, Chair, and thank you again, Chief Bussiere. As somebody who's seen a combine fire up close and personal, I can relate to the fact of, you know, how education is a great, great piece to be able to talk about specific fires, and kitchen fires are definitely an important one as well. You mention as well that you're in charge of retention for recruitment, and we talk about how important it is for volunteer firefighters. Do you think, overall, when you look at this bill, when we talk about what's going to

happen here – how do you think this will relate and help with both recruitment and retention of recruitment moving forward?

Thank you.

Mr. Bussiere: Sure, and thank you for that question. I think what the bill does is that it provides us as, you know, fire department and fire service leadership to utilize another tool in terms of showing appreciation to our members and having a day where we can action something in the community to do the same so that we're showing appreciation to our members, and that helps both with retention – happy firefighters stay around longer – and it helps with recruitment as well as it just generates that public presence and really shows people what we're doing and that we appreciate that work. Hopefully, if somebody is considering it, that extra bit of appreciation will help them make that final decision.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll open up the floor to any other questions. Do any opposition members have a question? Okay. I think Mr. Schow has one. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Bussiere. Did I get your name correct, your last name?

Mr. Bussiere: Very close, yeah.

Mr. Schow: I try. My last name isn't spelled phonetically, so I get all kinds of struggles with it as well.

I guess I'll take just a shameless moment to give a nod to you for your service but also to all the volunteer firefighters and those full-time firefighters across the province, who do tremendous work. It's invaluable. You can't put a price on it, and I'm just very grateful that I can go to bed knowing that if something happens – God forbid – you know, we have people close by who know what to do and will act calmly and professionally.

In particular, you know, I think there's an important part here you touched on, which is recruitment. There are always difficulties in these kinds of things, and I can imagine that anybody who goes into a line of work like yours or law enforcement or the military doesn't do it just to get recognition and have the casual "thank you for your service." You do it because you're in it, and you want to help people. I think that's incredibly admirable. I often laugh that it takes a special kind of crazy to put your name on a ballot to run for office, but it takes a special kind of brave to do what you guys do, so thank you.

I'd like to touch on a different part that you briefly hit in the last question from Mr. Sigurdson, which was retention. Would you have any information on what the average time or, rather, tenure of a volunteer firefighter would be? And then, to supplement that question, what challenges are you facing to retain volunteer firefighters?

Mr. Bussiere: Sure. I can speak a little bit to that as far as my own experience, which I think is relatively common across the province. You know, I would say that the average tenure of a volunteer, pay-on-call firefighter is probably somewhere between three and five years. We obviously have lots of outliers. Chief Krich mentioned he's been a member for 40 years. I started out as a volunteer as well, and I'm working towards 20, so there are obviously those outliers, but in my personal fire department, if we get three to five years out of a member we're happy with that. I think that is fairly common.

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly why people move on. I think that oftentimes it's life changes – kids, people moving, those types of things – that cause people to leave, but what we really actively try to do as far as the recruitment and retention committee goes is make sure that the reason people are leaving isn't because of something that we're not doing in the fire service or on the fire department that

causes them to leave. We need to make sure we're appreciative and we're providing those mental health supports. You know, things like presumptive cancer legislation, all of those things, in my opinion, help with retention. If we can eliminate any of those internal reasons for somebody to move on and just leave it to those external factors, then that's a win, in my opinion.

The Chair: Mr. Schow, go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Sure. Just a quick follow-up. I mean, maybe you could supplement that a little bit. Would you be able to pinpoint anything in particular that comes top of mind that would be a driver of why someone might leave a volunteer fire service? I have a number of friends who serve as volunteer firefighters, and like you said, some of them have just left because of other commitments and education or family. I totally understand that, but if there is something in terms of accessibility to training, accessibility to equipment, whatever, if you could just maybe highlight if anything comes to mind specifically.

10:35

Mr. Bussiere: Sure. I think that, in my experience, one of the biggest drivers for people leaving internally is just the demand on time. You know, time is a big thing. We try to make sure that every minute that our members spend on fire is valuable to them. But the demands on time due to training and due to maintaining training standards, attendance on calls: those are constantly increasing. Having a large workforce is always helpful, but the – in Lacombe county we train our firefighters to the same NFPA, the National Fire Protection Association, standard that full-time firefighters get trained to. So that's a significant time commitment for them and a significant time commitment to maintain that training. Any support that we can see that helps our members achieve that and get that level of training that they need to do their jobs safely and keep their communities safe is something that is really helpful with retention. But that would be my kind of simplest answer, that it's the demand on people's time that would see them leave.

Mr. Schow: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Any other questions?

Hearing and seeing none, Chief, thank you so much for being with us today. I hope that you have a great day. Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Bussiere: Thanks.

The Chair: Very much appreciated.

All right. Next we will move on to Mr. Brad Readman, president, Alberta Fire Fighters Association.

Sir, thank you very much for being here with the committee again. You will have up to five minutes for your presentation, followed by up to 15 minutes' worth of questions from committee members. Sir, the floor is yours.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Readman: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the invitation, and once again I am honoured to present to this committee. Thank you to the MLA for bringing this bill forward and recognizing the hard work that our fire prevention officers are doing on a daily basis. Prevention is the first step in fighting fires, and often that work goes unnoticed. It's a huge component of what we do, and it saves lives. You can't recognize that enough. I really, truly appreciate the work they do, and we need to ensure, moving forward, that that work is done and that that work is properly funded through the fire commissioner's office. As well, you know, we need to make sure

that we secure our mental health benefits for our members, our pension benefits for our members as well as the WCB and the municipal funding that's maintained throughout. I appreciate the work that's being done by this committee, and I would encourage the committee to move this piece of legislation forward.

Thank you. I won't take more time, and I'll revert to the chair.

The Chair: Oh, well, sir, thank you very much, and thank you for your presentation.

We'll next move on to questions from our committee members. Member Glasgo, we'll start with you. Go ahead.

Ms Glasgo: Good morning, Mr. Readman. Welcome back to the committee.

Mr. Readman: Thank you.

Ms Glasgo: I remember seeing you with MLA Phillips's bill, I believe it was. It's great to see you back again. I wanted to just thank you for your service in the fire department and for all that you do to keep our communities safe. You said that prevention and this recognition often go unnoticed, because of all the work that you guys do. I guess I'm going to ask you the same question that I asked another member of the service: what do you think is the most important part of fire prevention – I don't know if you're in an urban or rural area; I guess you can speak to that – and how can drawing more attention to that bring help to you?

Mr. Readman: Yes. Sorry. Thank you for that. I should go back. I've got two meetings going on here right now. We represent over 3,000 professional firefighters. I myself am a firefighter lieutenant in Red Deer, so I am within an urban setting.

Education. Public education is where a lot of that work is done, and that costs money. A lot of our departments do a lot of really good work with that. That's where I would say the strongest work is and then also investigating the cause of fires. They go out, they determine the cause, and they're able to relay that to the community, and then, again, better educate those communities.

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

Ms Glasgo: I don't have one. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We'll go to Member Lori Sigurdson. Go ahead, please.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Readman, for joining us again – nice to see you – and for your leadership within your organization also and, of course, the service that you do to keep us all safe. Of course, recognizing firefighters is very important, but we also know that, you know, it's a stressful work environment, stressful work that you do. People have talked about how you run towards danger while the rest of us run away. I just know that that has an impact on all of us, whenever we're in stressful situations. It's important, I think, for us to recognize you, but I guess I'd like to ask: how can we further support you, especially when we look at the mental health of firefighters and the supports they need? What would be your biggest ask of us as legislators?

Mr. Readman: I think it's to ensure that those mental health protections as well as the programs and benefits are still there. You know, we always talk about stigma in the fire service and that being a barrier to get help. I think that as a society as a whole and through the legislation we can break down those barriers and make it more accessible for our members and get rid of that stigma when they want to seek out mental health. Then the presumptive legislation

goes a long way in helping that, and let's make sure that we can continue to have that and support those programs that we roll out to assist our membership.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. I think that you are talking, Mr. Readman, about that presumptive coverage for PTSD so that the burden isn't on the worker to necessarily have to prove that; it's understood that this is the type of work where those kinds of situations are prevalent. The WCB does acknowledge that. So keeping those protections in place is key, and I hear that.

You know, I don't want to be – I don't know – sort of sexist in my comments, but I think there's a majority of men as firefighters, and you have to be tough and strong. I think that in this kind of a role it's even perhaps greater. I hear what you're saying about the stigma about being vulnerable, like, having to reach out. When you have a mental health issue, you do need to ask for help. When you're the person who is giving help all the time and then all of a sudden you have to ask for help – getting rid of that stigma is important so that you can access those services. So maybe you can just talk about what you think are the things that need to happen for that stigma to be alleviated.

Mr. Readman: It's education. You know, we do a lot of work through the International Association of Fire Fighters to do that work and to break down stigma through programs. I think what happens is that any time there is a review of the WCB, the presumptives come up. That really hits our members, because then it brings them concern. If we have to show or list every call that we've been on to get mental health support, that really hinders it. Any time there's funding or there are worries about contracts, et cetera, that also impacts the mental health.

You know, we look to COVID-19, the response that we had and the vaccine that was – it took a long time for firefighters to be recognized for the COVID-19 vaccine priority. We're grateful that it is there now, but that weighed on our members, and that created more issues with mental health for our members, because they're afraid to get COVID-19 and to bring it home. All those things impact our members on a daily basis. So whatever we can do to make sure that firefighters are prepared to do our jobs and give us the tools and supports to make sure that we have them – obviously, it alleviates a lot of the stress of mental health.

Ms Sigurdson: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Great. Thank you very much.

We'll go to Member Amery. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Amery: Good morning. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Mr. Readman, for being here and for your presentation and your advocacy for firefighters. I heard you earlier mention that you represent an organization that represents 3,000 firefighters throughout the province. My question is a little bit about that. I'm curious as to what you forecast as being some of the greatest needs in particular of firefighters in this province, in particular in the areas of technology and innovation going forward for the next, let's say, decade or so. Then I'll just ask my follow-up as well at the same time. I also want you to comment, if possible, for this committee and for the benefit of all those watching, as to what gaps you foresee in this industry, and what can we as legislators take away from this meeting here today for future expansions on the great ideas of recognition and bills like this going forward?

Mr. Readman: Yeah. Thanks for the question. You know, there's always a running joke in the fire service about a hundred years of service and progress impeded by the fire service. We're very slow to do that. But one of the key things in technology that is important to us is the radio communications, the data, the dispatching systems. Those need to be supported, to ensure that they're working, because that's what it does. That's what works for us. So I would say that that's one of the biggest things moving forward, the radio system, the AFRRCS system, ensuring that that is strong and working well.

10:45

As far as recognition, as my colleague President Rehman from 209 said, you know, asking a firefighter to be recognized – we don't do this job for recognition. It's a passion; it's our life; it's what it is. I would be remiss to say that we need further recognition. I think supporting us and supporting us in our communities is what we need for that.

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

Mr. Amery: No, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Member Irwin. Go ahead, please.

Member Irwin: Thank you, and thanks again for being here today. I know your time is super valuable, so we really appreciate it, Brad. You know, I just wanted to comment on Member Lori Sigurdson's remark earlier about the fact that firefighting is a male-dominated profession. We know that. As the critic for status of women I actually met with someone last week, a woman who is working with the city of Edmonton and fire to try to attract more women and nonbinary folks to Edmonton fire. A shout-out to them if they're watching this morning, because I know there's a lot of work that can be done in that area, and I'm excited that they're actually working on some really cool initiatives to address that.

But back to the topic at hand. You know, you spoke to us all about pensions and the need for this government to protect our pensions not that long ago. It seems to me that one of the best ways to recognize firefighters and their outstanding service would be to ensure that their pensions are protected. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Readman: Yeah. Absolutely. I always say that with firefighters you don't mess with the schedule; you don't mess with pensions and vacation time. Those are huge, our three things. I think that having a secure – you know, firefighting is a dangerous career; hence, why we have the presumptive legislation for the cancers that we're covered under. We have a shortened retirement. It's proven. It's science. Unfortunately, that's the way it rolls.

I think that showing that we have a secure pension plan, which we do within LAPP, speaks volumes because we know we're going to be okay. That's stress. Retirement stress is huge for a lot of our members, so moving forward, making sure that that is secure alleviates the stress. Not only is there stress on the job; there's the stress of life. We always talk about the glass becoming full, and if you can alleviate the added stress from the outside, the work inside will alleviate that stress as well and you'll be able to handle that better.

Speaking to the initiatives of a diverse workforce, you know, that's super important to us, and the IAFF is working very hard on that to make sure that we can attract a more diverse workforce.

Member Irwin: That's so great to hear.

Just on the piece around pensions again, yeah, you know, you kind of implied that there's a mental health component to it, too – right? –

the stress when folks aren't sure about their retirement security. I guess I don't really have a question as much as just the need to reiterate on the record that we implore this government to reconsider their actions when it comes to firefighters' pensions and, of course, the pensions of other public-sector workers, including teachers, who we know are working in very tough conditions right now.

Again, thanks for being here.

Mr. Readman: Absolutely. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other questions from committee members? Hearing and seeing none.

All right. Mr. Readman, thank you so much, sir, for being here. Thank you again for joining the committee. I hope you have a great day.

Mr. Readman: Awesome. Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you.

All right. Committee members, that was our final presenter, so that wraps up our stakeholder presentations on Bill 216. I'd once again like to thank all our presenters for joining us here today.

We'll next move on to deliberations and recommendations. The committee will now begin its deliberations on Bill 216. 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 216. 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 consensus that additional time is necessary.

I'll open the floor up to discussions by committee members with recommendations.

Ms Glasgo: I have a recommendation, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms Glasgo, go ahead.

Ms Glasgo: Okay. Sorry; I got onto the list late. I don't know what I'm doing here. It's, like, a year, and I still don't know how to work this thing.

I would like to recommend that Ms Lovely's bill proceed. I think that we heard a lot from our stakeholders. She brought in several stakeholders, more than I think that you even need to, to show just how important this is. I think this is a nonpartisan issue. We see from both sides of the aisle that fire prevention is so important, that recognition of our servicemen and -women is so important. Making sure that we have the ability as a Legislature to support them in any way that we can: I think that's something that we can all agree on. Why not move forward something that can unite us in such a divisive time and such a crazy time in our world? I think it's a great thing to be able to bring people together and show that our Legislature is working collaboratively.

The Chair: Ms Glasgo, I have a possible motion. Tell me if this sounds kind of like what you were thinking, possibly. Ms Glasgo moves that the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills recommend that Bill 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act, proceed. Does that sound about right?

Ms Glasgo: You read my mind.

The Chair: All right. Thank you. I do that for Mr. Nielsen quite a bit as well.

Mr. Nielsen, did you have another follow-up? Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Chair. I do. I wholeheartedly agree with the motion moving forward here. The presenters today, I think, provided us with some information that members of the Assembly can look back on while looking at Bill 216. You know, maybe there are some add-ons that they can consider to make this bill even stronger and really, truly show that recognition that I think firefighters all across the province deserve, rightfully so. Maybe there are ways that we can help them so that they can then go out and do an education piece so that Albertans know how to prevent fires and to make their jobs a little easier so that at the end of the day all of them can go home to their families safe as well.

I'm certainly hopeful that members of the committee will move this bill to the Legislature and that, ultimately, we'll see it passed in the House as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any further questions, comments?

Hearing and seeing none, I will put the question to the committee.

Ms Glasgo moves that

the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills recommend that Bill 216, the Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition Act, proceed.

All those in favour, say aye. On videoconference? Okay. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none,

that motion is carried.

Fantastic. Thank you very much.

All right. The committee has finished deliberations on Bill 216. Hon. members, the committee has concluded the deliberations 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. Schow: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Schow would like to move that. A possible draft motion would be that Mr. Schow moves 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 216, Fire Prevention and Fire Services Recognition 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 noon on Wednesday, May 5, 2021.

Any discussion, questions? No?

Hearing and seeing none, that question is now put to the committee. All those in favour of the motion by Mr. Schow, say aye. On videoconference? Thank you. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none,

that motion has been carried.

All right. Other business. Are there any other issues for discussion at today's meeting?

Hearing and seeing none, the date of the next meeting will be at the call of the chair.

Can I get a member to adjourn, please?

Mr. Nielsen: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen moved that the committee adjourn. All those in favour, say aye. On videoconference? Thank you very much. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none, that motion has been carried. We are adjourned.

Everyone, have yourself a great day. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 10:54 a.m.]

