



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, June 11, 2019

Day 11

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker  
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UCP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees  
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)  
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Official Opposition House Leader  
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)  
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),  
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP),  
Government Whip  
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Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UCP)  
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UCP)  
Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)  
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Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)  
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)  
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)  
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UCP)  
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UCP)  
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)  
Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)  
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., Taber-Warner (UCP)  
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Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UCP)  
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Madu, Hon. Kaycee, Edmonton-South West (UCP)  
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),  
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Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UCP)  
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Deputy Government Whip  
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, Calgary-Elbow (UCP),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
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Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UCP)  
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)  
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UCP)  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
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Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UCP)  
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)  
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UCP)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)  
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)  
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

### Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations

### **Parliamentary Secretary**

Muhammad Yaseen	Parliamentary Secretary of Immigration
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## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### **Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Gotfried  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Orr

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Eggen  
Getson  
Glasgo  
Irwin  
Jones  
Nielsen

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. van Dijken  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

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Barnes  
Bilous  
Dach  
Dang  
Gray  
Horner  
Issik  
Jones  
Reid  
Rowswell  
Stephan  
Toor

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Goodridge  
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery  
Carson  
Ganley  
Glasgo  
Guthrie  
Irwin  
Long  
Neudorf  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Rutherford  
Walker  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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Gray  
Lovely  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Rutherford  
Schmidt  
Shepherd  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Sweet

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Ellis

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Dang  
Deol  
Goehring  
Goodridge  
Gotfried  
Long  
Sweet  
Williams

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

Chair: Mr. Ellis  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Gotfried  
Horner  
Irwin  
Neudorf  
Nielsen  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Sigurdson, L.  
Sigurdson, R.J.

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Mr. Smith  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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Deol  
Ganley  
Horner  
Issik  
Jones  
Loyola  
Neudorf  
Rehn  
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Renaud  
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### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Ms Phillips  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Gotfried

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Barnes  
Dach  
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Guthrie  
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Rowswell  
Stephan  
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Turton  
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### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Hanson  
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Feehan  
Getson  
Loyola  
Rehn  
Rosin  
Sabir  
Schmidt  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Singh  
Smith  
Turton  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 11, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

### Orders of the Day

#### Transmittal of Estimates

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

**Mr. Toews:** Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Administrator, which I now transmit to you.

**The Sergeant-at-Arms:** Order!

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the Administrator transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

For interim supply the Administrator transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province of Alberta and certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

Please be seated.

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

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the 2018-2019 supplementary estimates. When supplementary estimates are tabled, section 4(5) of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act requires that an update to the consolidated fiscal plan be tabled. Accordingly, I wish to table the 2018-2019 third-quarter fiscal update, which serves as the updated fiscal plan. The quarterly fiscal update provides the framework for additional spending authority for the Legislative Assembly and for the government.

Mr. Speaker, these supplementary supply estimates will provide additional spending to the Legislative Assembly and 15 government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$8.9 million to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$449 million in expense funding, \$53 million in capital investment funding, and \$362 million in financial transactions funding. Some of these commitments relate to important activities, including wildfire management and emergency assistance; however, one of the largest expenses was to lease railcars. It is required by the traditions of parliamentary democracy that we must request funding for this ill-advised initiative.

In addition, I now wish to table the 2019-20 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government for the period of April 1, 2019, to November 30, 2019. This interim funding authority will ensure continuity in the business of the province while our government assesses the province's finances before introducing a budget in the fall of 2019. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$107 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$27.8 billion in expense funding, \$2.4 billion in capital investment funding, \$786 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$943 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

## Government Motions

12. Mr. Toews moved:

Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2018-19 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, according to Standing Order 18(1)(i) this is a debatable motion. Is there anyone wishing to speak to Government Motion 12?

Seeing none, is the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board wishing to close debate on Government Motion 12?

**Mr. Toews:** I'll waive this.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

13. Mr. Toews moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2018-19 supplementary supply estimates for six hours on Wednesday, June 12, 2019.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Motion 13 is not debatable.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

14. Mr. Toews moved:

Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2019-20 interim supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this is a debatable motion based upon Standing Order 18(1)(b). Is there anyone wishing to speak?

Seeing none, would the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board wish to close debate?

[Government Motion 14 carried]

15. Mr. Toews moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2019-20 interim supply estimates for three hours on Wednesday, June 12, 2019.

**The Speaker:** Members, this motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

7:40

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 7

#### Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019

[Adjourned June 11: Mr. Ellis]

**The Speaker:** Would the hon. Member for Calgary-West like to continue with the time remaining?

**Mr. Ellis:** No. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Why, thank you.

Is there anyone else wishing to debate on Bill 7? The hon. the Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak on the matter of Bill 7 that is before this House, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has put before us for our consideration. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has put forward what he says is legislation that expands the powers of municipalities to create a tax incentive program for nonresidential properties for up to 15 years. That might be, in fact, a good idea, which is why it existed beforehand.

In 2015, Mr. Speaker, the city of Lethbridge established a targeted redevelopment incentive policy to promote new construction or major renovation of medium- to large-scale commercial, retail, and mixed-use building projects that generate significant and ongoing expansion to the assessment base in the downtown core.

In May 2019, under this policy, council approved a \$680,000 tax cancellation over seven years for the redevelopment of Six08 Health Inc., which is a fabulous building in the downtown, about three blocks from where I live and where my dental hygienist has her practice. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this redevelopment of the downtown has led to renewed optimism among the business revitalization zone in Lethbridge, that we have, through this policy, and in particular the mixed-use building projects, been able to redevelop the downtown. A decade and a half ago, when I moved to Lethbridge, the downtown was just at the beginning of these conversations at the level of council and in the business community of how to make the downtown an attractive place to be. Like in many prairie cities, it had a number of challenges related to poverty, crime, drug use, and so on. I can tell you that this new targeted redevelopment incentive policy, that has been in place now for some time and is an 11-year policy that has been enacted by the city of Lethbridge, has been successful.

Clearly, they didn't need this bill to do that. Clearly, they didn't even need the refreshed Municipal Government Act, which twice our government brought before this Legislature and brought in a number of modernizations to the MGA. It's a big piece of legislation. It's one of the biggest. That's why almost every year governments find themselves in the position where they are doing a tremendous amount of consultation around the contents of the MGA. It's also because there are so many municipalities in Alberta, and we have a very vibrant level of democracy at the municipal level. And that's why I think municipalities were quite taken aback by this bill. They're not used to that. They're not used to people just kind of doing things without talking to them first. They take a relatively dim view of that, which is why we've seen municipalities speaking out on this matter since the bill's introduction.

There are, of course, other places where these kinds of tax incentives have been used, these kinds of tax tools. You know, despite the fact that we have these examples, we have heard claims from the government side that municipalities can only provide some tax deferral in times of hardship or for brownfield redevelopments, which was also a change that we made, in addition to some of the brownfield reclamation regulations in Environment and Parks, which was also something the municipalities asked for and have been asking for since about 2013. In fact, the government previous to us consulted on that, but that didn't feel like it was even good enough for us. We went back and consulted again because that's how municipalities like to have their relationship with the government of Alberta.

In fact, section 347, despite the government's claims, sets no requirement for hardship and indicates that a tax break could be provided in circumstances where council "considers it equitable to do so." You know, in fact, what we have here is that those municipalities who have been largely supportive are largely supportive because it is a thing that they already can do, are doing,

or may do in the future under their existing powers as they understand them and as had been consulted with the GOA regardless if it was the government previous to ours, our government, or even future changes that may happen. That is fine. You know, a government can take time to put something in the window to dress it up, if you will, but at the end of the day it's really not what municipalities are asking for.

Right after I was elected, I went about doing some community consultation in anticipation of this session, so I met with a number of different folks, including the business revitalization zone, the city of Lethbridge, various people in the arts community, people who work in the persons with developmental disabilities sector, both school boards, and others that will come to me as I talk. I had a number of meetings. You know, I think it's fair to say that many roads in many of those conversations led back to the question of stable, predictable funding for municipalities and a good deal for small to medium-sized cities fashioned along the lines of the deal that was put in place through the city charters conversation, which, again, was not something that happened overnight. It happened with a large amount of consultation, again, because that's how municipalities, in my experience at least – and I will give the minister this advice free of charge – like to be engaged with.

Really, what I heard from my mayor and council, and I'm sure many of you will hear as well – and I believe there's a small and medium-sized cities caucus meeting, a sort of impromptu group; I believe that the city of Lethbridge is hosting said meeting – is that what they're interested in is a long-term deal around MSI, what they've always been interested in, and some stable, predictable investments in the things that they care about that make their city more vibrant and more livable.

I spoke earlier about the tax plan, that this bill claims to enable, that has been happening in Lethbridge for some time. Layered on top of that, the city of Lethbridge has really taken its social responsibilities seriously, and we're a really good example of collaboration. I believe that you can do that sometimes better in medium-sized cities than you can in larger places just because everybody knows each other. It's hard not to collaborate when you see each other in the grocery store on the weekend. They obviously undertake Team Lethbridge as well, that whole effort of bringing a whole bunch of people, public and private sector, to the Legislature for a couple of days, typically in November, to make the case, you know, "Hello; we're here; there is a world outside of Edmonton and Calgary," which I think governments of all stripes probably need to be reminded of periodically.

Lethbridge has done these things, but it's also taken a really comprehensive approach to its downtown. Certainly, they've done this business around the tax deferral, and it has actually been quite successful. One need only take a tour of downtown Lethbridge to see all the vibrant small businesses and all the activity going on there. They also have very serious concerns about their safe consumption site; the housing investments that are supposed to be coming, that were in fact committed to; and the new intox facility, that was in fact committed to. We have some new detox beds, but we need more, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the issues around housing are significant, and our government made a commitment to supportive housing, new units, approximately 40 units of supportive housing. Really, city council and the business revitalization zone in my discussions with them were really pinning their hopes for further development, for further growth, for a vibrant and inclusive community on those aspects, not on a bill that, quite frankly, enables them to do something they're already doing. That's in the past, and my city council, at least, is looking to the future.

The other piece that they take really seriously and that I think this government should, too, is around the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission. The city of Lethbridge was the first city, as I understand it, in Canada to adopt the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They do a land acknowledgement at almost every city event that I've ever been to. I cannot recall one where that was not done. In Lethbridge, Mr. Speaker, we say we're a Blackfoot territory. It's not even a treaty acknowledgement due to how the local First Nations wish to be referred to. That's as a result of history, and that history is important. It's important for the provincial Crown, the little Crown as I always call it, to recognize that just as much as the big Crown. I will leave that as a piece of advice for all government members because it's embarrassing that we're even having this conversation. Those are the kinds of priorities that Bill 7 does not speak to. Those are the kinds of priorities that, if anyone had taken the time for a 45-minute meeting with just a smattering of municipalities, they would have identified prior to introducing this legislation, which, as I said, does something that people are already doing.

7:50

One of the other really key pieces that municipalities are in fact worried about and that has already been on this government's legislative agenda, to our great chagrin, is of course the cancellation of further funding commitments from the climate plan to the large cities and instead taking whatever residual funds that were left over from the price on pollution and just putting those into general revenue, essentially removing the ring fencing around the revenues, the commitments in good faith, the legislative commitments that came before this House. It's rescinding that and just leaving the large cities with absolute uncertainty in the same manner as happened to the mid-sized city, the one with which I have had the most interaction, and that's, of course, the city of Lethbridge. Of course, that piece was also not consulted on, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think that that really shows that there's potentially a learning curve there for the new government in terms of how they engage other elected levels of government. I certainly look forward through the Education Amendment Act to some of that consultation happening with school boards. I certainly haven't seen that yet. Just as Bill 7 is not what municipalities are asking for, neither is Bill 8 what boards are interested in.

There have been years of consultation, both on the MGA and on the municipal sustainability initiative. Now, MSI was never designed to be permanent, despite what some municipalities will tell you. It wasn't. It was always scheduled to sunset in some way, shape, or form, but the trick for government was to negotiate a deal through consultation that was good for Albertans and had municipalities share in our fortunes and was good for municipalities.

It serves no one for me to have to take my car in for repair every three or four weeks because I hit another giant pothole. That serves no one. It serves no one to have a downtown that has social disorder and disarray and inequality and my municipality not being able to address those problems. It serves no one for our friends who own small businesses in small cities to not be able to work with their business revitalization zone and others to be able to make a living. That certainly serves no one. It certainly serves no one to have an arts community who is waiting on commitments around MSI for things like a performing arts centre. I was describing to one of our colleagues just this afternoon that the city of Lethbridge is waiting on some certainty around MSI for a new performing arts centre. The federal contribution has been made, and the city contribution will be through MSI if MSI stays as it is. Certainly, not just our arts community but also Tourism Lethbridge and our small business community are very much waiting for the commitment around that

performing arts centre. That will really help us, again, in addition to the tax tools that are proposed in this nothing-burger bill.

Those are the kinds of things. If the province was really interested in legislating around municipal issues, then might I suggest a city charter that is not immediately in tatters? Might I suggest an MSI formula that somehow is fair for all involved? That doesn't mean that everyone gets everything they want, neither municipalities nor province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments. I see the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood rising.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West as well. I really appreciated her perspective and, obviously, being here in Edmonton, hearing the Lethbridge experience is an important one, particularly when it comes to this bill. As the member noted and others have noted in this Chamber, we really see that this bill is a whole lot of nothing given that much of the provisions are already happening across this province.

The Member for Lethbridge-West and a number of other members spoke about the collaborative approach that they took, particularly as ministers. I know the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview outlined the importance of working collaboratively. They were really able to see the fruits of their labour in their previous roles, particularly in rural areas, in the heartland, and a few other examples that were outlined earlier.

Now, I know the Member for Lethbridge-West mentioned that she met with, you know, business revitalization zones, business owners, and community members over the last number of years, which again highlights just that, the collaborative, co-operative approach, Team Lethbridge, as she called it. I worry about the perhaps unintended consequences of this government's approach because we saw that both mayors Iveson and Nenshi sort of raised their concerns about more of a competitive model, not the same collaborative approach that our government took. I know the mayor of St. Albert also raised some of her concerns. You know, I guess I would just like to pose to the member: should we be concerned about the approach that this government is taking with Bill 7? Perhaps we're issuing a bit of a warning here that, you know, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, in answer to the hon. member's query, the challenges for a large capital region or a large metropolitan region such as Calgary, where you have a number of bedroom communities and others who may be availing themselves of city services but living somewhere else and paying taxes somewhere else: those challenges are a little bit different in southern Alberta and certainly even distinct from a place like Grande Prairie, where we do see this phenomenon happening as well, where the city of Grande Prairie sometimes has a hard time keeping up with all the service provisions for people who live outside of it.

That may be less of an issue in Lethbridge, but something that is more of an issue, I would argue, is the vibrant arts community and the instability that this government has introduced through not actually meeting the concerns of municipalities. Because we have a vibrant arts community, they contribute mightily to the regional economy. We are home to a number of recording artists that we as representatives of this province might want to go out and brag about. They are some of the leading lights in terms of the alternative

country, Americana, Canadian roots music scene in Canada, and they live in Lethbridge.

What the arts community, when I meet them, are very worried about is CFEP, CIP, and FCSS in particular; FCSS because a lot of the arts community, musicians, artists, and others also work with people with disabilities through a number of different programs. That's oftentimes what people's day jobs are. That's not just about quality of life for musicians having jobs. It's also about quality of life for people of all kinds of different backgrounds and differently abled people. Certainly, the arts community is concerned, as I mentioned, about the future of the performing arts centre and our ability to attract talent and, therefore, economic activity to the downtown and elsewhere.

The CFEP and CIP programs, too, are of deep concern to the arts community, and they have come up in other conversations in terms of city councillors who are more connected to the arts community. Those are smaller grants that sometimes make it easier for a nonprofit to do things like invest in equipment. The taiko society: I remember giving them a cheque for some new drums. Of course, we have a large Japanese-Canadian population in Lethbridge from the fairly sad legacy of World War II. We have a whole bunch of different taiko groups in Lethbridge. Certainly, the arts community is concerned about those things given that we are a regional hub for arts activity, Mr. Speaker, and Bill 7 does nothing to address any of those actual concerns of actual Albertans who live in southern Alberta.

8:00

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 7 at second reading? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. Nellie would be proud of that long-drawn McClung and appreciate that emphasis.

I'd like to start my comments, Mr. Speaker, by letting the House know that I recognize the theme or pattern that the government has adopted here. The UCP government seems to be adopting a pattern that is not unlike that of the former Progressive Conservative government, the last one that we defeated when we came to power in 2015. That former PC government made announcements of phantom projects repeatedly, school projects in particular. They just kept reannouncing and reannouncing and reannouncing school projects beside signs that were in vacant fields, and these projects just never got built. Well, this Bill 7 reminds me of that theme and that process.

This enabling legislation just re-emphasizes powers that municipalities already have. It's like the young son who brushes his teeth for the second time in front of his mom, so she'll see what he's done, and says: what a good boy am I. Well, just repeating your steps, just reannouncing projects, or just revisiting or raising awareness of the powers that municipalities already have doesn't accomplish anything.

It appears as though in the process as well that the current government is looking to nail as many nails into the coffin of the collaborative approach to municipal and regional governments as possible. I'm just wondering if they couldn't see the collaborative approach more as something that would be described in the past as a barn-raising bee, where the community got together to help one another build their projects. That is considered perhaps by members of the opposition to be an enterprise, something where they got together, but not a collaboration. Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, collaboration is the modern barn-raising bee if that's a way of having the members of the government accept the process.

It's a community effort. It's an effort where people get together to look at their strengths, to solve problems that they jointly have,

and, for example, as I mentioned earlier today in the House, to perhaps have the economic anchor of a school be maintained in a community, where one community will decide to do grades 3 to 4 and the other community will decide to do grades 1 to 2 and thus keep the schools in both communities viable and, in so doing, allow the community to survive and maintain a threshold population. Those types of community projects, the collaboration, that effort, are something that this Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019, actually goes a long way to decimating.

It's a means of getting communities to pit oneself against another, and it ends up making communities the worse off for it. You know, competition is one thing if you're talking about the survival of the fittest in nature, where wolves or coyotes or other predators will compete against each other. We're talking about human beings and communities in Alberta, where collaboration is a more productive way of acting together in unison to accomplish goals that have a common objective.

Mr. Speaker, I really hope that the members opposite in the government can take another look at how they would describe the collaborative efforts that we attempted to enshrine in legislation and in the associations that we hoped to engender between communities and regional municipalities and maybe see it in the framework that helps them to grasp the concept. I suggest, perhaps, that it's the modern form of a barn-raising bee, and maybe that's something that they can attach themselves to.

I'd like to also suggest that the legislation is something that really is already in place. The measures in it already exist, so it's a totally unnecessary piece of legislation. I'll give you a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker, to detail that. For example, showing that this measure and ability already exists in current legislation, the community of Chestermere created a policy in 2019 to enable tax cancellations for nonresidential commercial developments, industrial developments, seniors' housing, and multifamily housing in the form of three- to four-story apartment buildings. The city provided an example of a \$10 million building that qualified for a discount. Therefore, the developer would see municipal taxes waived for three years and could receive a total refund of approximately \$235,000. That policy would expire at the end of 2020, and council said in the release that it hoped the incentive would fill some vacant lots. Mr. Speaker, that policy already exists and has been taken advantage of by communities in Alberta recently.

Calgary is another example. In May 2019 the council in Calgary provided a one-time cancellation of \$94,000 in property taxes for the Royal Canadian Legion in Kensington. No secret. It's already in place. Unnecessary legislation. This Bill 7 accomplishes nothing that does not already exist and, in fact, is simply just a means for the government to reintroduce something and say, "What a good boy am I. Aren't we doing something for you?" when, in fact, there's no benefit that isn't already conferred upon municipalities in this legislation, so it's really unnecessary, do-nothing-new legislation.

I could go on with other examples and suggest that there would be current municipalities that do provide tax breaks in times of hardship or brownfield developments. The members opposite would suggest that that's the only time that they could perhaps provide these tax breaks currently, but that's not the case, as I've just cited that Chestermere and Calgary certainly do it already.

The mayor of Edmonton is largely supportive of the whole project, but he said that any additional flexibility is generally a good thing; however, we want to learn more. He's concerned. He said that I think we've got to have a conversation in our region to see how these tools will grow the regional economy because selective use by one of us to undermine the others could be the one risk here.



Mr. Speaker, pitting against one another municipalities who right now are more akin to look towards a collaborative approach is the exact wrong direction that we need to go in this province.

The regional government model that we're looking at in and around Edmonton and the surrounding areas of Calgary, even, dare I say, Red Deer, as well, where people are looking to see what they bring to the table and how they can benefit the larger group in terms of transportation and infrastructure projects and utilities and economic development: there's no end to the projects that they find a better way forward than collaboration. Collaboration is not a buzzword; it's a reality that's been discovered by government after government after government that works and doesn't pit communities against each other. In the end you end up having much more efficient use of resources and an excellent rapport between the regional municipalities and an integrated infrastructure that actually works for the long term and is more cost-effective.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really unhappy that this government has seen fit to bring forward a piece of legislation just simply to reintroduce something that already exists, claiming credit for doing something to assist municipalities when, in fact, they've already got the opportunity to do what the bill purports that they're bringing on new. I really do expect that the public will take notice of this although the government is probably hoping that they won't, and they'll realize that this government has got an empty piece of legislation here. I certainly am one who encourages all members of this House to make sure that they express their disapproval of it.

When we were government, Mr. Speaker – and I know that the current government doesn't like to hear us talk about it because they say, "Well, we were slammed in defeat. We got 55 per cent of the vote." True. Guess what? 45 per cent of the population didn't vote for you, so there's a significant dichotomy in this province, and there's room for plenty of debate, and that's what's going to happen. It's a healthy thing in this province. Good on you. You won the election, but I'll tell you what. You won a percentage of the vote, but those people that didn't vote for you also deserve a fair hearing and representation and to be respected as well.

8:10

There's a great debate going on in this Legislature, and I think it's a healthy one. It's basically a tug-of-war between two economic schools of thought. We're looking at demand-side economics, which, on this side of the House in opposition, we in the NDP caucus will purport as the best way to go. The other side of the House, the current government, is a supporter of supply-side economics. That's a long-time economic debate that's been taking place over a few generations already and will probably go on long beyond our generation and this Legislature. However, the current demands of the province, economically and socially, demand that we take the debate seriously and rather than trying to run roughshod over each other personally, seriously take a look at what applies best given the current economic frustrations that we face in this province.

Here on this side of the House we believe that demand-side, stimulating spenders, where we recognize 70 per cent of the economy in the aggregate is consumer spending – if you put more money in the hands of consumers, you're going to increase demand and therefore stimulate jobs and job creation. The opposite view is well expressed by the current government. We, of course, are at loggerheads on that, and I welcome a real, solid intellectual debate on that so that people in the province can really understand the choices that are before them. Maybe somewhere there are some ways to compromise, there are some bits and pieces that the two economic schools of thought can be in a collaborative way implemented. I think it's important that we take a look at the whole

issue very intellectually and be honest about the fact that it's a healthy thing to debate amongst ourselves as parliamentarians and to present clearly the choices to Albertans.

There are a lot of people who are on both sides of the fence as far as support for the governing party and the opposition party regardless of the seat disposition in the House. You know, 55 per cent of the vote is 55 per cent of the vote, but 45 per cent of the population, Mr. Speaker, did not vote for the government. I think the government does itself damage if it forgets that. Certainly, boast about getting your 55 per cent. Fine and dandy. You won the election, you got a majority, and you rule the roost at the moment. But the 45 per cent of the people who did not vote also deserve the respect that currently doesn't seem to be forthcoming. I for one will stand up for those people, as I was elected to do, with pride, dignity, and an insistence that they receive the same from the other side of the House.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments. I see the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford rising to make a brief question or comment.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just interested in the comments made by the previous speaker about the nature of co-operation and the fact that the government side of this House has sort of sold the farm and lost the plot and forgotten their roots with regard to the type of co-operation that helped to build this province, the idea that people working together can achieve so much more than people going after each other, attacking each other in order to get personal derived benefits.

I'm very interested in some of the experiences from his hometown of Thorhild, I believe. I know that there have been a number of organizations such as the farm-fair society and other groups that have demonstrated the benefits of co-operation and the notion that we as citizens in a democracy, particularly in Alberta and, of course, within the country of Canada, have been able to achieve great things because we have not allowed that terrible inequality of some people succeeding while others do not. We have not allowed that to get as extreme as in some countries in the world, where very few people derive all the benefits of the natural resources and the power within the society. Instead, we try to share those natural benefits.

I know that whenever I spend time speaking with the indigenous community, they highlight this very point, that a society really only does well when people are co-operatively working together to try to achieve the benefits for all. It's not simply a form of governance, but it's also a spiritual value within the indigenous community, that when one makes a decision, you don't simply make a decision for your own welfare and your own benefit but you actually think about the larger community and have the decisions that you make benefit the larger community. Of course, they're not just speaking about the community in the sense of, you know, the immediate relations that happen to live in the same home that they live in but, of course, all of the other people around them who live in homes next door and around the valley and down the stream and, in fact, across the country.

I know that they talk not only as a widely geographically – of course, you know, Cree people living in Alberta see their families extending not just in Alberta but across Saskatchewan and Manitoba and Ontario and Quebec. I know that the Blackfoot people, for example, still recognize a Blackfoot Confederacy that spans not just southern Alberta but, of course, through Saskatchewan, through the northern United States into the Dakotas. What they talk about is the fact that we work together to create an

environment where everybody can have their needs met in a reasonable way. They talk not only about that geographical spread but also talk about a historical spread, and that is that decisions that are made should be made not only for this immediate generation but for future generations. I'm sure many people have heard the expression that a decision that is made should be made with forethought about the next seven generations down the road.

I do know that the speaker was speaking quite eloquently about the fact that that kind of belief system, that kind of philosophy is very important in terms of creating a society that is in and of itself a good society, that allows each person to achieve their greatest good in terms of their own skill set and their own ability to contribute but also to derive from that society a reasonable and fair share of the benefits of that society.

You know, in the indigenous community that was demonstrated largely when, for example, someone would have the opportunity to go out hunting and would shoot a moose and would return back to the community. They didn't put it back in their own home and stock up their own shelves and ignore the rest of the community. They brought it to the community setting, and they shared the benefits of that successful hunt with everyone around them. That's the kind of co-operation that built this province long before this province was a province, long before the settlers came and settled in this community. The value of a shared community is very important, and I'm sorry that we're losing it now.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 7? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill 7, the Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019. We know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs recently announced legislation claiming that it's going to expand power to municipalities to create tax incentive programs for nonresidential properties for up to 15 years. Unfortunately, it doesn't do that. There's no real change that we see because municipalities already have the ability to provide tax breaks for nonresidential properties under the MGA. We've heard about a few examples already as we've been debating this, some from Calgary, Lethbridge, Chestermere.

We've also heard that there's been a significant lack of consultation around this. Our municipal leaders across the province haven't really had a lot of consultation or input into this legislation. Perhaps if consultation had occurred, something more than what already exists would have been presented in this bill. We know that municipalities are worried about the reckless cuts, \$4.5 billion in corporate tax giveaways, and how this is going to impact their ability to serve their residents.

8:20

There are claims from the government that this bill will allow municipalities to defer taxes for up to 15 years, like I had mentioned, that it will attract new investment and developments as a result. Unfortunately, it appears that the majority of the powers that the UCP claims it's giving municipalities already exists under section 347 of the Municipal Government Act, the MGA, that I had referenced earlier. Where in the MGA does this exist? It's under section 347, Mr. Speaker. Let me read to you what it already does. Section 347 states:

(1) If a council considers it equitable to do so, it may, generally or with respect to a particular taxable property or business or a class of taxable property or business, do one or more of the following, with or without conditions:

- (a) cancel or reduce tax arrears;
- (b) cancel or refund all or part of a tax;

(c) defer the collection of a tax.

(2) A council may phase in a tax increase or decrease resulting from the preparation of any new assessment.

That is already currently written in the Municipal Government Act.

Municipalities that have created tax incentive programs or provided tax breaks for nonresidential properties include – we heard the Member for Edmonton-McClung talk about some of the stuff that was happening in Chestermere.

In Lethbridge in 2015 they established TRIP, the targeted redevelopment incentive policy, to promote new construction or a major renovation of medium- to large-scale commercial, retail, and mixed-use building projects that generate significant and ongoing expansion to the assessment base in the downtown core. Policy states that it will establish an 11-year municipal tax cancellation policy to provide incentive for the construction or major renovation of commercial, office, retail, and mixed-use projects. In May 2019, under this policy, council approved a \$680,000 tax cancellation over seven years for a \$4.85 million development by Six08 Health Inc., something that already happened under the legislation, that this government is saying they're going to implement in this legislation. It's already there, Mr. Speaker.

In Calgary one that I'm particularly proud of is happening. In May 2019 council provided a one-time cancellation of \$94,000 in property taxes for the Royal Canadian Legion in Kensington.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the examples of how this current bill isn't needed. The municipalities are already doing these things. They can already provide tax breaks in times of hardship or brownfield redevelopments. Sorry, I lost my place. New authorities will be created to allow municipalities to establish tax incentive programs for businesses, job creators, and investors through bylaw. That's already possible, for a municipality to create a tax incentive program through bylaw. This is not prohibited under section 347 of the MGA.

They say: new authorities enable multiyear tax incentives to be created. Again, Mr. Speaker – I'm sure you're not surprised to hear this – this can already happen, as evidenced by Lethbridge, which established an 11-year tax incentive policy, and Chestermere, which we heard earlier has a policy in place until the end of 2020. They're saying that it allows for proactive cancellation of taxes, not just retroactive tax breaks. This again is not true. Under section 347 a council can cancel, reduce, refund, or defer the collection proactively.

In short, Mr. Speaker, while this bill may clarify existing authorities and prescribe how municipalities can create tax incentive programs, it does not fundamentally shift the authorities that exist already under the act. These are minor tweaks, not major shifts.

Mr. Speaker, if the government wants to attract investment, they need to take practical steps, like some of the things that we did. So I'd like to highlight some of the things that our government did to support business. We cut the small-business tax by a third. We made thousands of loans more readily available by a \$1.5 billion increase to ATB Financial's borrowing limits. We worked with the Business Development Bank of Canada to establish a \$1 billion fund for new business loans along with mentoring supports. The new Alberta investor tax credit has provided refunds to hundreds of small businesses on green technology investments. We doubled funding for a technology development program with Alberta Innovates, helping hundreds of small businesses go from testing to marketing. Small-business incubators were added to help businesses grow faster, and mentoring supports were expanded so entrepreneurs could launch more start-ups, innovate, and expand. Through a partnership with Business Link, one-on-one supports and resources for immigrant clients helped newcomers get ahead.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation that's been introduced under the Municipal Affairs minister doesn't do anything. It speaks to a whole bunch of things. It perhaps provides some clarity to municipalities. Municipalities were not consulted on this. I'm sure, had they been, like I mentioned, they would have come up with something that would have helped. This is just simply not a bill that does anything. I think – it was a reference to *Seinfeld* – it's an entire bill about not much.

**Ms Hoffman:** One press conference.

**Ms Goehring:** One press conference.

Again I would encourage members of the House to not support this bill because really there's nothing in here that allows municipalities to do anything that they aren't already allowed to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has questions and comments. The hon. the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was quite enchanted with the speaker who comes to us from Edmonton-Castle Downs, who just spoke. I wanted to actually hear if she had any historical background from her family or her family's rural roots that would perhaps shed some light on the theme of collaboration, which seems to be under threat from this piece of legislation.

I know from my background that – you know, you were speaking about societies – well, ag societies are very much an important element of co-operation and collaboration in this province. They have a history that goes back to 1947. Currently there are 293 agricultural societies which operate and are relatively important to significant communities in Alberta, including Edmonton. Of course, Northlands is one. However, in my home village of Thorhild – I'm going to become an honorary citizen of that community, I think, if I have anything to do about it – the ag society there is still operating.

Of course, it was something that my grandparents belonged to in their roles as community leaders. It created the Thorhild stampede association, which still holds the Thorhild Stampede. It used to be July 1 and 2, but I believe it's just a one-day event. That brings people from far and wide. It brings the whole community together in a collaborative effort. When they first started the Thorhild Stampede, my grandparents and great-grandparents would bring their own stock to the stampede. Each of the community's townspeople would ride each other's most rank bulls and horses. Usually a little wager was on between them. It could have involved money, could have been corn liquor. I'm not sure. But there was certainly something on the line for whoever got to ride the longest or the hardest.

Now, other forms of co-operation also existed. There were community development projects. I know that my great-grandfather Walter Horne was involved in the community. There was a need for a school in the village, that was trying to attract a teacher into a teacherage. A building was required. So they got together with a few others and on a stoneboat, otherwise known as an old gate, hooked up to a team of horses, hauled a granary off my great-grandfather's farm to the village of Thorhild. That was the first school in town. These community development projects are collaboration amongst people to help each other out and get things done. In the same way, we're asking that this government consider maintaining that collaborative spirit in the province of Alberta by not pitting communities against each other.

I was going to ask the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs if she wished to talk about some of the experiences of her family in

the past or maybe even locally in Castle Downs where she's witnessed collaborative efforts to help keep community efforts going, whether it be a project or a community league, the construction of a hall or what have you, to ensure that communities survive. There are lots of ways that communities can express themselves, Mr. Speaker, to show how they can support each other and serve a need that's more regional in nature than themselves alone and thereby serve the wider community and people within it.

8:30

It's not only schools. It can be business. It can be a means of having local businesses decide that they're going to be, for example, serving one particular element of the farm implement business, and you will decide as an implement dealer, which, of course, my grandfather Horne was also one – he was a John Deere dealer. He was one who had a familiarity with tractors, and he was more the horsepower guy rather than the pulled implements. People would come to him quite often for their first tractor after being involved in farming using real horsepower, like two horsepower or four horsepower. They'd come in to get their John Deere from him, and that would be the first tractor that they actually ever owned after giving up their horses. So I know that at a community level and a regional level collaboration works. [A timer sounded]

**The Speaker:** We were so close to hearing from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs with respect to her rural roots. It's disappointing for the entire House not to have that opportunity.

Is there anyone else wishing to debate Bill 7?

Seeing none, would the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs like to close debate? You don't have to. [interjections] Perfect. Thank you for that very decisive decision.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

## Bill 8

### Education Amendment Act, 2019

[Adjourned debate June 10: Member LaGrange]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before us we have Bill 8 at second reading. Is there anyone wishing to join the debate? I see the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Surprise, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much, colleagues, for the opportunity to debate. Actually, I wish I didn't have to say thank you. I wish we weren't actually debating this bill. But we're here, so I will engage in my opportunity to say why I think this bill is so damaging and why I think we shouldn't be here debating this.

Let me start by referring to Bill Hate, an act to destroy GSAs, which, clearly, is just that. This bill has been a strategy to attack LGBTQ youth, queer youth, who said to us when the old Bill 10 was passed, after much pressure from the public particularly – the backstory to that was, as the former Premier, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, outlined earlier this afternoon, about how there was pressure because a member of an opposition caucus brought forward an independent bill, a private member's bill. Again, private members' bills are really important, I think, because not everyone has the opportunity to sit around the cabinet table and drive an agenda.

A private member from an opposition caucus brought forward a bill saying that they wanted to create GSAs, flowing from work that had been done in other jurisdictions, including Manitoba mostly at that time. The government was put in such an awkward position, where there were certainly a number of people in the party that

didn't want them to move on this. Then there were also many people in society who knew how important it was.

The reason why they knew how important it was is because they had exposed themselves to the research, research that showed that students who were LGBTQ, gay students, are far more likely to be successful in completing high school, successful in maintaining a home address, not being homeless, and successful in terms of finishing an average life expectancy – not dying, Mr. Speaker, to be very frank – when they had opportunities to be part of gay-straight alliances, specifically, gay-straight alliances or queer-straight alliances, not general inclusion clubs, not diversity clubs, not everybody-is-in clubs, but specifically clubs where gay or queer was named in the title, where kids felt that they could be included.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

One other thing, to go back even further, actually. The very first GSA originally started with a different title – it was called students and teachers opposing prejudice – and it started in Red Deer. Red Deer is the home of GSAs in North America. It was the first beacon of hope and of stopping prejudice and stopping discrimination. So that's an interesting point. It started at Lindsay Thurber high school, and those students definitely deserve a shout-out for the work that they did back then.

Back to the government being pressured through a private member's bill to bring forward something. They didn't have to bring in anything. They could have just voted on the private member's motion. But the government of the day was particularly hostile towards opposition caucuses and didn't seem to want to acknowledge that anything good could come from anywhere other than the cabinet bench, to be honest, it seemed to me. I'm sure the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat can recall his experiences. I believe he was here during that time. The governing cabinet at that time didn't have much latitude given to their caucus members, didn't have much time for other caucuses outside of – well, really, for anyone outside of cabinet. That really seemed to be the way it was.

Lo and behold, the government decided: "Hey, we're going to fix this. We're going to come in with our own bill – our own bill – and then you can have two bills on the Order Paper that address the same topic, so the private member's bill will get bumped. Our bill will take precedence, and that will be just grand. We'll all get to debate our bill. Oh, and we also won't do all the things that are going to actually protect kids or include the word 'gay' or include measures that have proven to be necessary in other jurisdictions, including Manitoba."

That backfired. There ended up being, I think it was at the light-up at the Leg., hundreds of people coming out to protest. Rather than enjoying the light-up that December season, there were hundreds of people out there protesting, demanding an opportunity to have their voices heard.

Very quickly, the cabinet scurried. They drafted some amendments, and they came back and said: "Oh, never mind the horrible stuff that we said we were going to do. Remember when we said that we were going to make you kids go to Tim Hortons to have your support group? Clearly, that would be a safe place for you to discuss this. We can't force the school to make you have these conversations. It's just too controversial, so you'll have to go off campus. You'll have to go across the street, maybe. If you don't feel comfortable in Tim Hortons because somebody might overhear you, well, then, maybe you can just hang out in the back parking lot. That would be a nice solution, right?"

All of these things continued to shame and suppress rather than protect and demonstrate pride. My hon. colleagues, through you,

Mr. Speaker, this is why pride is so important. Because pride is the response to suppression. Pride is the response to oppression. Pride is the response to shame. For an eternity, people who were gender-identity or sexual-orientation minorities were shamed. So this is why pride is so important.

Here we jump to today – oh, no. There was some more stuff. Sorry. A trip down memory lane. So that bill came in: public shame. They amended it. They said: "Sure, kids can have GSAs on campus. Never mind, we just misspoke. Don't worry. That was a communications error. Sure, kids can have GSAs on campus."

Then we had an election, and that was one of the issues that certainly motivated many people. In the election before that, there was the lake of fire, but it seemed to definitely spill over into that election, some of the concerns around the way that the then PC Party had handled, or mishandled, queer youth so significantly, the way that they had absolutely bullied these youth and tried to push shame and stigma in terms of: go to Tim Hortons or go to the parking lot to have your GSA meeting.

So we had a change of government. We're sitting around the cabinet table, and the Education minister makes it very clear that the youth in this province haven't started creating GSAs or QSAs at increased rates. When we asked him why, he said: "Well, because the bill says you need to do all these things, but it doesn't say when. It doesn't say that you actually need to do them timely." "All right, then. That's something that we can address. You must do it immediately."

8:40

One of the reasons, again, why we acted on it immediately is because we used the evidence around information that showed that where there are students who are minorities in this way, who feel that they're at the point where they're asking for a club, often they're at the point where they really need somebody to turn to, and they really need somebody to give them that emotional or psychological support.

So saying, "Instead of us actually helping to create this support group for you, why don't you go for counselling; why don't you give it a little bit more thought; why don't you create a more inclusive group because you don't want it to just be the LGBTQ kids" – one more part of this trip down memory lane, of course, includes when I was at Edmonton public schools. We brought forward a policy to ensure that all LGBTQ youth have safe, respectful learning environments and that it be the same for staff, students, and families. We were very proud of the work that we did, and I think it's guided a lot of the policies around this province, and I'm very grateful for that.

We brought forward a resolution to the Alberta School Boards Association around that same time, and one of the trustees in debate said: "Well, you know, they wouldn't need these groups if they weren't acting so gay, right? If you didn't act so gay, you could blend in at school, and you wouldn't get harassed or bullied." It was outrageous, and it was something that I think a lot of Albertans were deeply concerned about. After he said that, CBC was, like: hey, do you want to come on the radio and explain your position? He basically doubled down on what he'd already said. So it was clear that there was a need for people who were entrusted to provide policies and take care of youth to have education themselves around how to actually take care of kids and provide safe, supportive environments.

So this has been a long and winding road, but the kids were very clear with us. The kids said: enough delay; we need it to be immediately. Fortunately, we had a fantastic Education minister, who acted immediately and brought in an amendment to Bill 10 to

say “immediately.” Well, in this new Education Act that’s completely removed.

Then the kids also said: we really appreciate the immediate piece. There was another piece, turning to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: “immediate” and maybe it was “naming”? I’ll get back to that one when that second brainwave comes. It’s a little bit later. I’ve been speaking since my friends and I were in Public Accounts this morning, it feels like. Sometimes my brain is a little slower than my mouth.

This is how we sort of got to this point where kids said that they needed it to be much more quickly, and that they needed to make sure that there were staff on campus that would act immediately to support them. Making these changes to this act the covert way, of course, is intending to do this and just say, like: oh, we’re just going to go back to the way it was four years ago. Well, the way it was four years ago, kids were still in high – oh, of course. The guarantee that you not be outed, the guarantee that there not be parental notification: that was the second piece. Sorry. My brain caught up. So that was the second amendment that was made. Again, that piece hasn’t made its way into this act.

The reason why we did that – the minister will tell all of us, will say: well, PIPA and FOIP provide the protections. School administrators, school teachers told us: “We don’t know if we have an obligation in loco parentis to tell parents that their kids have joined these clubs or not. We need clarity from you, government. We need clarity. Should we tell them? Must we tell them? Or shall we not?” That’s it, three very basic things that they said. We didn’t just listen. We stood up and said: fair point; we will make sure that we give that clarity.

So those are the two main amendments that give youth the ability to join these clubs and do so in a way that enables that it’s done quickly and that it’s done confidentially so that they get the support that they need.

I also want to say that some people who’ve never been to a GSA meeting – and I’m sure they’re happening, probably, in most of our ridings. If they aren’t happening in your riding and you want to come see one in one of our ridings, we can probably invite you to one of them if you have questions or concerns about what GSA meetings look like. I know that, for example, in my own riding the Edmonton Catholic school teachers have a GSA, a GSA for the teaching staff, because not that long ago there were many teachers who felt that if they put up a picture of their family in their locker, in the staff room, or even in their classroom, they could get fired for putting up that picture. So the teachers themselves got together and formed a GSA.

I spoke to one teacher who, when his partner of many, many years – I’m going to guess probably 20 years – passed away, didn’t feel that he could actually call in to the school and take the time off because of the fact that he was grieving for the loss of his lifelong love. He had to say that he had a family emergency and get a doctor’s note. It’s very sad and very wrong that teachers not that long ago – we talk a lot about kids, but this is also about that whole school environment, which is why we said: staff, students, and families – did not feel that they could confide in their employer, confide in their colleagues to say: this is why I need time off, because I am experiencing this grief and this trauma in my life.

These amendments were done in a way to protect kids based on what the kids told us and based on what the people who work with the kids told us. That is why this bill, in my opinion and in the opinion of the youth that I spent time with in Calgary, at the protest that youth organized – and when youth organize something, kids are really good at organizing, you know. Like, let’s meet up on our phones. Remember when PokeStops were all the rage a couple of years ago? They’re really good at arranging that kind of stuff: well,

let’s arrange a protest down at city hall, where we have to call, we have to book the site, we have to make sure the police know where we’ll be marching. Like, that is a lot of amazing co-ordination from students, mostly high school students, that went into organizing that protest.

The students told us – one person came up to the stage who had graduated a few years earlier and talked about how when she was outed by other people in the community to her parents, she was evicted from her home. Living homeless in rural southern Alberta, trying to find somebody to go from couch to couch, to get that little extra safety from, put her in a very precarious position. Now, her parents a few years later had another child come out. When that child came out, that child had an opportunity to make that decision on how to address it with their family themselves, had talked it through with some of the supportive staff at the school and come up with a plan, and when they came out, the parents responded very differently and, actually, welcomed that older daughter back into the home.

This is the power that support groups, specifically gay-straight alliances and queer-straight alliances, can have. They cannot just change and save lives; they can also support families. So by taking this tool away from school staff and from families, I think that we are not just putting kids at risk, which is – I am confident that there will be many times where members of the front bench will stand up and say: one child dying is one child too many; we need to act to make sure that this never happens. What we’re doing through consideration of this bill is creating conditions for that to happen.

I think that it was a parent who was talking about supervised consumption and about putting the blinders on being akin to being complicit to homicide. I would argue that by us putting these kids in this position of precarity, where these kids have told us that it causes unsafe encounters – and I want you to all know that I believe that the vast majority of parents are loving and kind and supportive. I really do. But if there is one who is willing to send their child onto the street and that child dies, I think we have an obligation to respond in a way that ensures that doesn’t happen.

The research is clear that there have been many ones. So if one child dying is one too many, we have an opportunity to prevent that from happening through our strong and vocal opposition to this bill. I know that for members of the caucus you probably haven’t had a ton of time to engage on this. You probably haven’t had an opportunity to really voice your concerns with your leader, with the Premier, and with the minister responsible for this bill. But I call on you to do so because one child dying is one child too many, and I don’t want any of us in this room to have that on our consciences.

I also want to mention that at that Alberta School Boards Association meeting that I was referring to, there was discussion and debate about: oh, well, if it’s gay kids now, what’s next; fat kids? I have to say that the person who came up to the mic next was a bigger gentleman, and he definitely – I was never sure what he was going to say when he came up to the mic. But what he did say was that he was a teacher in a school before he was a trustee and that there were kids in that school that were absolutely bullied, bullied for being gay or appearing gay, acting too gay, just like that other trustee had earlier said, and that the biggest regret he had in his life was that he allowed it to happen and in some cases he actually contributed to that harassment and that bullying.

As a 60-some-year-old gentleman he said: “I don’t want another teacher to ever have the guilt and the remorse that I feel today. I think that we owe it to teachers to make sure that they know what they need to do to keep kids safe and protected and loved. It’s pretty simple.” That was from Terry Riley, the trustee for Medicine Hat for many, many years.

8:50

It's not the same. It's not the same as being called out for the colour of your hair or your weight. I'm sure the trolls are having lots of fun with me talking about people being overweight. It's not the same, though. It really isn't.

That's the main thrust I want to address on this. I do call on all of the caucus members who are here who are not in the cabinet and haven't had an opportunity to really voice these concerns to, please, on behalf of the children who are telling you that they feel at risk because these changes have made a difference in their lives, don't let this get pushed through. Don't let your Premier and your Minister of Education tell you that this is the strongest law in the province or that it will still be the strongest law in the country because it's simply not factual. I think that we presented those facts earlier today. I know that there was an interesting ruling.

The facts are that other jurisdictions have taken it a step further from where Alberta was five years ago because other jurisdictions knew that their laws needed to be strengthened, their policies, their laws, their types of intervention to keep kids safe.

That is the bulk of what I want to say with regard to GSAs and, specifically, the act to destroy them.

There is another piece I want to touch on tonight, and I imagine I'll have opportunities to voice other concerns at other stages of bill consideration. The other piece I want to touch on is the piece where it's mentioned that trustees can be removed from the board if they breach the code of conduct and if the majority of the trustees vote them off the board.

None of us in this position can get evicted from our positions, can get kicked out from being an MLA because the other MLAs in this Assembly don't like us being MLAs, but that's what we're proposing in this bill, that trustees who have some kind of breach and other trustees deem to expel them have the ability to do that. It's only the people who hire you that have the ability to fire you in this place, right? You have the ability from your leader to get kicked out of your caucus, but then you get to sit in this lovely corner. You don't have the ability to get kicked out of this Assembly unless your constituents choose to expel you. Why is it that we think it's okay for trustees to be able to fire another trustee when the electorate are the ones that elect them? It just doesn't seem fair or just in any way to me.

I leave you with that. I think if you want to have a discussion about recall – and I know there have been discussions about that – sure, consider that through an amendment to this. But nobody should be able to fire an elected official other than people that hire that elected official.

**The Acting Speaker:** Under 29(2)(b) there is not an opportunity for questions and comments, but after the next speaker there will be through 29(2)(a). So are there any other hon. members looking to speak to this matter? It looks like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** That's right. Thank you. Thank you very much. Just as the previous member stated, I want to say that it's an honour to get up to speak to this, but it's not. For me this is a personal issue, as I think everyone in this House is aware, being a member of the LGBTQ community and also having a background in education.

I was a teacher in rural Alberta. I taught primarily senior high social studies in the metropolis of Bawlf, Alberta. Yes. Following that, I was a vice-principal in Forestburg, Alberta. I moved back to the city after being in Forestburg. As I said, you know, in previous conversations, I wasn't able to really thrive out there. I wanted a change. You know, people kept trying to set me up with their farmer

brothers and whatnot, and it just wasn't right for me. But it was an incredible experience being out in rural ...

**Ms Hoffman:** Appreciate the company.

**Member Irwin:** That's right. It was an incredible experience being a teacher and administrator in rural Alberta. I learned a great deal out there and a lot of lessons, and some of those lessons I will share tonight.

I came back to Edmonton about nine years ago or so, and I started working with Alberta Education, primarily in curriculum for the last number of years. Again, education is something that is quite dear to me.

Just as the previous member noted, there's a lot in Bill 8 that we can speak to, a whole lot of components that will require unpacking. But I would like to focus on GSAs as well, gay-straight alliances. As I said, I am a queer person and I'm proud of it. I'm what this Education minister would call a "whatever." I cannot joke about this. You know, it's not funny that this government refuses to acknowledge my community directly, refuses to use the language of queer, trans, bi, gay, lesbian, two-spirited. GSAs save lives. Students deserve safe, welcoming, caring schools. This is Bill Hate. This is an act to destroy GSAs. It's toothless legislation that simply won't do what it needs to do.

As was noted, we know that it's Pride Month. We know that this government made an attempt to raise a flag, but they were met by protest. They were met by protest from folks saying things like: "You know what? LGBTQ rights are human rights. You can't attack our rights and raise a flag. Simply raising a flag doesn't make you an ally. Your actions, including your actions in this Chamber, make you an ally." The culture minister told media at that flag raising that by doing so, it's a commitment from government to support all Albertans, and she added that love is love. Well, unless you're the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, then it's not. Gay love is not love. His quote, not mine. I agree that love is love. But, again, by being willing to roll back, to repeal those supports for LGBTQ students, you're saying that our love is not real love.

In addition to flag-raising protest, as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora spoke about, we just saw a whole group of students on their own organize in response to this proposed legislation. She nailed it. I mean, again, I've talked before about being a social studies teacher and the role that we have as social studies teachers in encouraging active, engaged citizenship. What an example of citizenship in action, those kids taking it upon themselves to say: hey, if we as students aren't going to respond to this, then who will? But they're also looking to us in the Legislature, which is why it was so great that the members for Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-North West and, I believe, others as well were there in solidarity. They want us now to be standing up against this legislation right here, and that's what we're doing.

We saw folks in Edmonton as well gathering on conversion therapy, trying to bring attention to again another move by this government to show that they're not supporting LGBTQ rights. So we asked. We asked just the other day: how is this government claiming to be allies to the community when we're seeing that the changes that they're bringing in will traumatize, will harm the LGBTQ community?

And we're not talking about ancient history when we pull up some of the facts that I want to share with you. We know that the Premier stated on the campaign trail just two months ago that, you know, he doesn't want to get distracted by issues that voters aren't talking about. He was saying that in relation to GSAs. I'll tell you, I mean, I'm getting so much feedback on this. I do get the odd troll that says, "No one cares," that calls me a man, calls me ugly. But

I'm not going to stop fighting because, as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said, we know that this is about saving lives. So we're going to continue to move forward, and we are going to allow this to be a distraction for us because it's not a distraction. Saving lives is not a distraction.

Now, one of the things we shared was that the Member for Edmonton-North West did an incredible job as the Education minister, working tirelessly to ensure that Bill 24 was legislation with teeth, that truly protected LGBTQ students. We know as well that there were 28 schools that were unwilling – 28 schools out of a whole lot of schools – so I should say that our government was quite effective in getting schools to work with them, to follow the legislation. But there were 28 schools who were not willing to follow that legislation, and those schools were set to lose funding at the end of May under our plan.

9:00

I worry about the kids in those schools. I think about the kids in those schools right now who have teachers and administrators that aren't supporting them, who don't have a safe home environment. As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora noted, we know that a lot of parents are supportive and a lot of parents welcome their children and, you know, are open to them being members of the LGBTQ community; however, we know that there are some that are not. So I think about those students in those schools, and I worry.

Now, we know the statistics show that LGBTQ youth are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges. The rates of suicide are higher, and the rates of homelessness are higher. Bill 8 is going to make these students even more vulnerable.

We know that Bill 8 removes the immediacy clause. What that means is that if I'm a student and I go to my principal, my vice-principal, my school administrator and say, "Look, you know, I really think it's important that we start a gay-straight alliance," that principal can take their sweet time in responding. I know. Again, as I said, I was a vice-principal. I know that, especially in a rural school, where we were, you do wield a lot of power. I worry that any delay at the school level – again, its not hyperbolic – could mean life or death for those students. I'm trying to not get emotional here. If you're struggling with your sexuality and you're being told to just wait, to just hold on: "We'll figure this out; let's talk about it," or "Let's not call it a gay-straight alliance; let's not call it queer because those terms offend," I can't imagine what those kids are going through.

This minister also claimed that Bill 8 is modern, that it's going to be some of the most modern – those are her words – legislation. I don't know what's modern about this. I don't know what's modern about turning back the clock when we can point to – again, I like to point to evidence. I told you that I worked in the Ministry of Education for many years. We always liked to do jurisdictional scans. We always liked to before making any decision. Particularly, I was working on curriculum, and before making any decisions, we'd say: okay; how do other jurisdictions approach climate change in curriculum? That is something we actually did review. I sure hope it stays. It's really important that you take that jurisdictional approach, that you look at what other provinces, territories have done. We know that other jurisdictions have ensured very strong protections for LGBTQ youth. Bill 8 puts us back, puts us near the bottom of the pack when it comes to these protections, despite what the members opposite will say.

The minister talks about balance. She's talked about that a lot. Balance between what? Balance about what? She said that LGBTQ students have told her that they want balance. I don't know who those kids are; I don't know who she consulted. I wish she were here so . . .

**An Hon. Member:** She might be.

**Member Irwin:** She may be. Perhaps she's listening.

I don't know what youth were consulted. I'm not saying that she didn't consult youth; I'm certain she did. But I'm hearing from countless youth, and they're certainly not saying the same. They're concerned. These were young people who weren't of voting age, right? You know, think about the countless kids who over the last number of months have responded.

We talked about the most recent protests, but go back to the walkouts weeks ago. Myself and a number of other members attended the walkout at Victoria school, and again we heard from kids first-hand just how important GSAs are. Of course, the Premier's response was that those students should be in class instead of doing politics outside of school during school hours. I was so proud to see those kids out there, again, organizing themselves.

I guess I ask: if the minister isn't listening to kids – again, I'm certain she's listened to a few – who else is she listening to? Well, this is the same Education minister who, we know, in the very recent past was aligned with Parents for Choice in Education, who, again, you can simply google to see that they've promoted anti-LGBTQ rhetoric in the past. She's the same minister who in 2016 said to a right-wing news site that it wasn't necessary to, quote, create additional policies for one group. That was in response to our government trying to fix the loopholes in Bill 10.

It's absolutely important to have protections for one group. Again, I mean, I'm a member of the community. I have some, I guess . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** Lived experience.

**Member Irwin:** . . . lived experience. That's exactly what I was looking for. Thank you for that.

We've also heard the real experiences from young people, and many of the members, at least on this side, have received letters, e-mail, Facebook messages, and so on. I talked the other day about an example of an LGBTQ student walking down the hallway having to experience an onslaught of homophobic, transphobic insults and then being told that they couldn't have a support club, that they couldn't call it a gay-straight alliance, and that kid dropping out. That's a real story. That's what Bill 10 allowed, and that's what Bill 8 will allow.

As a teacher I saw kids who could have used GSAs. Just as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora noted, you know, one of the things I regret is hearing homophobic insults and not doing enough. Years ago we didn't have gay-straight alliances at the schools that I taught at. We didn't. I think back to some of the experiences, some of the kids that I know were struggling. We just didn't talk about it. And it's something that weighs on me today. I should have stepped up, and I didn't. I regret that, but I also wasn't safe. I wasn't an out teacher. I myself was struggling with my own identity. So GSAs help teachers as well. They don't just help students; they help teachers as well. They help the entire school community. They bring about acceptance. They start a conversation.

I've noted that I've received a whole heck of a lot of correspondence on this matter. I know, actually, that some of the other members across have as well. I've got an example here from one young person who shared this letter with the Member for Grande Prairie, and he also shared it with me. I asked him today if I could share a part of what he said in the Legislature. So I would like to do that.

His name is Ethan Wohlgemuth, and he's writing to express his concern with the recent legislation.

Notably, I am disturbed by the move to remove protection of members of GSAs from being outed. I would like to provide you with a personal anecdote so that you can understand where members of the LGBTQ+ community are coming from when we are demanding protection of GSAs. When I was closeted ...

**The Acting Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a) I believe I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to encourage the member to finish that quote, please.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you.

When I was closeted, my fear of being outed dominated my entire life. It shaped everything I did. I actively modified my actions, my speech. Everything that I presented to the world was shaped by a fear of people finding out that I was gay, and continues to now, even though I am a proud openly gay man. I did not have access to a GSA when I was in high school, and the consequences of this lack of a safe space, where I could openly be myself, are still present today. Coming out is an extremely difficult and personal decision, especially when openly homophobic people are in government. It is completely unacceptable that your government believe that it is okay to take this decision away from people. Coming-out is our personal decision that we take when we are ready and when we feel safe. What your government is doing under Bill 8 would remove GSAs' legitimacy as actual safe spaces. If students are afraid that they would be outed for joining a GSA they will not have access to a safe space. They will not have access to a space where they can discuss LGBTQ+ issues. They will not have access to a vital resource for LGBTQ+ students. I have a close, personal LGBTQ+ friend who in her last year of high school wanted to join a GSA so that she could have access to a safe space. However, as the GSA was scheduled after school she could not attend as she would have to explain to her parents why she wanted to stay later after school. We, members of the ... community, are acutely aware of consequences of being outed. Among other things, we know that many children are kicked out of their homes for being members of the ... community. Teachers will not always be aware of the degree of or presence of homophobia of parents. Legislation should not assume that most teachers and most parents are not homophobic, and that they understand the complexities of the issues faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community. In addition to protection of GSAs, I believe that comprehensive ongoing teacher education training and parent support groups, developed in consultation with and vetted by the ... community, is essential. Legislation should be built for the worst case scenario, not an optimistic ideal.

And the letter goes on.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Thank you, Ethan, for sharing that with us. Ethan's story is a powerful one, and it's truly one of many. So I urge the members opposite to think about those individual stories because I would bet that nearly everybody across the Chamber from me knows somebody who is a member of the LGBTQ community. Perhaps that person is in your family. Perhaps that person is a friend. But I'm quite certain that you do. So think about this. This is not for political gain. It's for ensuring that no student has to come to school and be afraid of who they are.

Thank you.

9:10

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there are a couple of minutes remaining under 29(2)(a) if anyone has any additional questions or comments for the hon. member.

Seeing none, are there any others that wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. I want to say at the beginning of my speech that on April 16 the UCP won the election. They got a mandate, and I respect that. However, just two or three weeks into that mandate that was given to this government based on jobs, the economy, pipelines – during that election I think they made it clear that these are the priorities of Albertans, and certainly Albertans agreed. They would not talk about social issues. They would not legislate social issues. They were not high on their priorities. In their assessment that was not high on Albertans' agenda. All those things. So they got the mandate.

However, in the last couple of weeks we saw that Albertans, in particular young Albertans, young students across this province challenged that mandate here in Edmonton last week and last Sunday in Calgary. Essentially, they were challenging that mandate, that they didn't give a mandate to this government to put their safety at risk or whatever they were doing through Bill 8. That's not the mandate that they understood, and they openly and publicly challenged that mandate.

In their legislation they did a communication exercise. They even included in their preamble that they want to make the education system inclusive. However, that group of students didn't feel that they were included through this bill. Rather, they maintained and they voiced their concern that that change that's coming, brought forward through Bill 8, is not inclusive of them. Rather, they raised the concern that it will put their safety at risk.

They stated in their preamble that they are trying to provide "high quality and socially engaging learning opportunities ... to meet diverse student needs." That diverse group of students didn't feel like that. Otherwise, they wouldn't have come out in those large numbers here in Edmonton, in Calgary to voice their concerns. Clearly, they are feeling that they are excluded through this bill. They are feeling that it's not a socially engaging learning experience for them if this bill gets passed. It doesn't meet their needs. Not only that; it puts their safety, their security, their learning at risk. I think that if they don't want to listen to the opposition, they should pay attention to these students who organized those walkouts, and those rallies were huge, bigger than any UCP election rally. So I think they carry a bigger mandate, and they must be heard.

In my riding of Calgary-McCall I think education is really important. It was important in 2015 as well, when I ran the first time. At that point my own niece and nephews used to travel in a different quadrant of the city to get to school, and just in the last four years alone in Calgary-McCall we were able to open six new schools, fully fund enrolment growth in all those schools. We were able to support teachers, student aides, the staff that was necessary to support those students.

Not just that; I think province-wide we were able to build or renovate 244 new schools just in those four years, and on the operational side of things we were able to add almost \$2 billion to fund enrolment growth, to fund classroom improvements, all those things. That's in contrast to what I think I already have once shared – but I think I should share it again because that was the previous PC government's record – that from 2008 to 2013 not a single



school was built in Calgary, not one school. That's how much they cared about, I guess, education in Calgary.

When I was running this time around, again education was an important issue, and it still remains an important issue. After getting elected, I met a few stakeholders, even my trustee, who were concerned about education, and if government was responding to their concerns, that's not what they were looking for. None of them, whom I met, raised that there needs to be something different than what's already in Bill 24 about LGBTQ students. None of them mentioned that. None of them mentioned that in the education system, in the way changes were brought by the previous government, there was something that was completely broken.

Rather, the things they mentioned were enrolment growth, which we have to push for pretty much every question period since the session started, every single question period, and every time the answer we get: ah, we might maintain; we might increase; we're not sure. Yesterday there was some indication that there will be funds for enrolment growth, but today they were back to the main message: we will maintain an increase. Not sure where it's going still, and we are still waiting for a panel to come up with suggestions for how to cut and gut public service, public education.

All those who are in that system, public trustees, everyone is worried whether there will be enrolment growth funding. Like, CBE alone was predicting a \$40 million shortfall, a deficit, and they were already planning to lay off teachers and other staff because they're left with uncertainty. They are not getting the answers.

9:20

They are not seeing this government focused on the priorities, focused on the concerns that the boards are facing; instead, we are seeing this piece of legislation, which nobody asked for, which nobody was looking for, and I think in just three weeks. Like many other pieces of legislation, there is no evidence before us that the government consulted with the school boards, that government consulted with trustees, that government consulted with parents, students, and all those who are concerned about education. I guess, looking at this bill, it clearly shows they didn't, because in our brief conversations, like, the first thing that comes up is funding predictability, and this is not what it's about.

The other thing I think I would suggest is that when you try to fix something, you clearly identify what the issue is, what is broken, and if something is not broken, you don't fix it. When this piece of legislation was introduced, I think there was no clear indication of what exactly they think is broken that they're trying to fix.

The argument we heard is that this piece of legislation will create the strongest protections across Canada. That was presented to us as a factual assertion. Today when they were challenged on it, and later on there was a point of order as well, the Government House Leader defended that, the government side defended that: no, no, there can't be a point of order because it's a matter of debate. On the one hand they want us to believe that this piece of legislation is bringing changes that will create the strongest protections for LGBTQ students, but on the other hand, when they're challenged on that, they will defend it, that: no, no, it's a matter of debate.

Clearly, it doesn't tell us what is broken; clearly, it doesn't provide the strongest protection across this country. If you don't want to listen to us, I think the students who gathered outside this Legislature, the students who gathered outside city hall in Calgary last week – had anybody gone there, they would have known that they don't agree with the government that this bill is bringing the strongest protection.

There are many other things that are concerning in this piece of legislation. If this legislation was to support students, if this legislation was to support education, literacy, and all those things,

I think they could have kept things that were better in the previous 2012 act like the age of access, but they knew, the government knew, that that will cost money, and they wanted to avoid that, so they changed the age of access back to where it was under the previous legislation.

Then they said that the transportation provisions would no longer apply to charter schools. In my riding, from that experience, transportation to school was a big issue because transportation was cut by CBE in 2014 and then in 2016. There are many students of many different backgrounds, like faith backgrounds, cultural backgrounds. In the absence of schools in our riding, students were travelling to other TLC schools, and those schools are also funded by public money. Those students are also Alberta students, and it should not be the criteria that if you choose to go, or if you don't have any other options and you choose a charter school or traditional learning centres, TLC schools, that you will not be provided transportation.

It's just downloading the responsibility onto the parents. The first thing that we did when we became government was that we brought forward the legislation that helped to reduce transportation costs and helped to reduce school fees and all those things to make sure that parents don't have to choose between their kids' education and their food. But here we are seeing a trend that they are off-loading the cost onto the parents.

Similarly, they said that it's about an inclusive education system. If we go through the bill, it even removes references to specialized support and all those things. If we were to make this education system inclusive and stronger, we would have seen more and stronger protections for those who need additional supports, who need specialized supports. Again, this bill is weakening those supports as well.

It also removes the duty-to-report requirement for charter schools re teachers and superintendents who resign, retire, or are terminated. I think all those schools, when they are getting public funding, should follow the same code. The public has a right to know the reasons why if somebody is removed or terminated.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for brief questions or comments.

The Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member was in the middle of a thought on this matter of Bill 8, which is so important to so many of our constituents. I wonder if he might continue those thoughts.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** That indeed was a brief question or comment from the Member for Lethbridge-West.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Lethbridge-West for the question. What I was talking about was that this piece of legislation, Bill 8, removes the duty-to-report requirement for charter schools if a teacher or superintendent is terminated based on some questionable conduct. The reason it's concerning is that for those who attend charter schools, those who attend even private schools, there is some form of funding that comes from government. Regardless of what schools these students attend, they are all students, they are all kids, they are Alberta students. If something is not acceptable in a public school system; for instance, the Holocaust. If somebody is targeting one particular community, denying that, that may not be acceptable in public school systems and may create grounds for dismissal and all that. The same grounds should be valid for a charter school as well, that

those kids should not be exposed to those kinds of discriminatory views.

This piece of legislation is in fact weakening our education system by removing those protections that kids should not be exposed to these kinds of hateful or discriminatory views. I'm just giving that example but, again, nothing was mentioned about why it was necessary to remove that protection. Again, if something is not broken, you don't fix it. But here I think it's a deliberate attempt to weaken our school systems and our education systems.

Another thing I want to talk about is that it also lifts the cap on charter schools and creates a process for that. I'm all about choice in education. I'm all about inclusive education. I'm all about that parents should be able to educate their kids in the way they see fit. However, that should not be done at the expense of our public school system, where all students can go. There is no indication of what kind of consultations were done with parents, with school boards and why it's needed, why those changes were needed at this time.

9:30

One last thing. With respect to safety in schools, safety of LGBTQ students in schools, I think that during the campaign and afterwards there was rhetoric that somehow we want to bypass parents and all those things. But we do have a child intervention system, which is based on similar principles, that when kids' safety is at risk, that takes priority. That's paramount over anything else. So our personal views should not be allowed to trump student safety.

With that, I would say that this Education Act doesn't do what it's saying it will do. It's not creating an inclusive education, a socially engaging experience for diverse student needs. Clearly, there are many students – there are students all across this province – who are protesting against this bill, these changes, and they are challenging the mandate you got on April 16. If that was in your mandate, I think those students would not be calling your mandate into question. I think it's important that this government should put the brakes on it and get back to the drawing board, reach out to these students who are protesting that, reach out to school boards.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to provide debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important bill. While I have a number of important things I will address over the iterations of this bill coming forward in this House, I have a particular one I would like to focus on tonight. Before I do that, I'd like to just take a moment to thank the MLA for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for what I thought was an incredibly important, profound discussion of the importance and value of GSAs in schools. I'd like to thank her very much for that. In my other opportunities to rise on this particular bill, I will follow suit and speak to some of those profound issues on a human level.

But right now I would like to take an opportunity to talk about an aspect of the bill that has not yet been widely spoken about, and in order to facilitate my point, I'm going to indulge in a little hyperbole, quite contrary to my natural inclination. I think it's important that we do that in order to show the problem inherent in the bill. As I talk about this, I want to identify at the beginning that I'll actually be talking about three aspects of the bill that, all together, provide a significant problem which is not necessarily identified by talking about the aspects individually. Tonight I would like to take the time to weave those together and demonstrate how the compounded effect of those three aspects of the bill are concerning, in fact I would say even potentially dangerous.

I'll start by just identifying the aspects of the bill that I will be discussing this evening and then go back and speak to them a little individually and weave them together so you can follow. Three things, I think, are really important that we must understand are happening in this bill: first of all, the diminishment of the protections and rights of children, who need the protection of GSAs in order to be able to exercise the full extent of their human rights; that is, the right to be protected in their status as a gay student, which is recognized by the Human Rights Commission in not only Alberta but, of course, all across Canada.

This bill tends to diminish what is, in fact, a human right in its practice. It doesn't say that they don't have that right, but it indeed interferes with that. We know that the Supreme Court of Canada, on other occasions and in other situations, has made the ruling that even if you don't specifically defy a law, if you prevent people from being able to enact the benefits of that law such as human rights, then you are indeed breaking the law. In this case, I am very concerned that that's the situation that we're in, that while people are being told that, yes, you can be gay and that you have the human rights that are associated with your free expression of your gayness, you can't actually enact it in a way that you choose to do so by having that protected GSA in the school. So I'm very concerned about that just on its own merits. I think the Supreme Court has actually indicated in other situations that they are concerned about that kind of undermining of human rights in a surreptitious way.

The second thing that I think is potentially concerning and that I will talk about here is the fact that there is clearly an intention to increase and make available the number of charter schools in this province. Now, I introduce that hesitantly because, in fact, I am in favour of having charter schools. I think that there's a positive benefit to having choice. I see that people have different needs and so on, but how that is done is very important in terms of the outcome that is experienced by the population. For example, in the city of Edmonton, under the Edmonton public school board and the Edmonton Catholic school district, a number of charter schools have been created but working within the present school board so that it becomes part of the public system, available to everyone, and, most importantly, following all of the rules of the public system.

In those cases, in a large city, where you have some choices available to you, you can choose to go to a school like Vimy Ridge, that's focused on military history and training, if you choose to do that. You can go to St. Francis Xavier high school and learn how to be a great hockey player. You can go to a number of schools and have a chance to focus on something particular. In that case, I'm quite happy to have those kinds of choices made available to people in a big city. However, I do have some concerns, which I will get to in a moment, about what happens in a place that isn't a big city, where the number of schools is much smaller and the segmentation of the school system in a small community, where there are just enough students to satisfy the needs of one school to remain open, may be affected by having people make the decision to separate out and not be part of the larger public school system. I'll get to all of that in just a moment.

But the third thing that I want to speak to is the fact that they are allowing trustees to make the decision to fire other trustees; that is, the power is being put into the hands of a majority to condemn and to disenfranchise a minority with whom they do not agree. Now, fundamentally, in our system we are very concerned when that happens. For the last few hundred years, in these parliamentary democracies that we have created in places like Canada, Britain, New Zealand, and Australia, and other places in the world, we have strived to ensure that while the majority does rule in a situation, that rule does not turn into tyranny of the majority over a minority, that

prevents a minority from being able to enact their rights in a legitimate way.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I've identified three areas where this bill already is problematic on individual bases. That tells me that this bill is not ready for prime time, that this bill needs to be taken off the papers and brought back for reconsideration. Now I want to engage in a small bit of hyperbole by tying those three together and having you begin to imagine what happens when we have a situation where all three of those things occur at the same time.

9:40

Take, for example, a small rural community somewhere in Alberta that has a group of people arrive on their doorstep with an insular sociopolitical view of the world that has the intention of creating in this small rural area a sociophilosophical community that in some way wishes to undermine the human rights of others and that then comes into that community, breeds, draws in more members, and creates a large enough community that they then are able to say that there is a demand or a need for a charter school. They are given a charter school, and in that charter school they include their sociopolitical world view and defy the human rights that the rest of us in this province enjoy.

In doing so, they become essentially a dictator to everyone in the small community, who have no choice because the community cannot support two schools. The only one that becomes available is the one that this majority group has put together and called a charter school. So you have individuals from the minority, what has become the minority in this community, in a charter school. Should they wish to defy this, should they wish to challenge this, they may elect a trustee to represent their point of view, but now, because we have the ability for trustees to fire others, the trustees supported by this particular sociopolitical and -economic group will look for a reason and an excuse to fire the trustees that do not share their point of view.

Now, this is where the hyperbole comes in. I'm very concerned about the nature of a Waco, Texas, happening here. I'm very concerned about a Bountiful, B.C., happening here, where a group comes in, defies human rights, creates a situation, and now has been given control over not only their own school but the school for all the kids in the community.

I can tell you why this is concerning, why this is terrifying: because it's not hyperbole; it's happened. I can tell you that in the indigenous community they called them residential schools. A community came in with their own world view, created an education system that said: only our point of view is allowed, and all others will be not only denied the right to express their values but will be severely treated should they choose to challenge those values. I'm not talking hyperbole anymore, am I? I'm talking about the fact that in the history of this province we have allowed the combination of these kinds of thoughts to lead to the ultimate oppression and destruction of other people, of people who have lived on this land for thousands of years. I can tell you that that is why I'm worried about this.

I can tell you that they already tell me in the indigenous community that if you live on-reserve, you're not even allowed to vote for trustees. They have no voice in the school as it is right now. What happens if that school becomes a charter school and becomes the only school that your children can go to? What happens if that school decides that they do not like some of the human rights that are freely expressed in the rest of the province and begins to deny that?

Here's the hyperbole, the little, tiny piece of hyperbole I wanted to introduce there. Take, for example, a community that somehow decided that the disfigurement of children was part of their value system, that they took their children and decided to scarify them, that they decided to cut off parts of their body or to wound them in some way as part of some kind of a tradition within this community. It would be a defilement of human rights, but we've just said: if you don't like human rights, just form a charter school, and then you don't have to follow up.

Now, if I put it in those terms, if I say, "What you're asking for is the defilement of the bodies of your children," you'd all look at me and say: "That's ridiculous, Richard. That's hyperbole." And I'd agree with you. But then I'd want to remind you that nothing I have said has not in fact actually happened, not only in the province of Alberta but in other places in the world. Nothing I have said is science fiction. Nothing I have said is fantasy. It is, in fact, part of the history and tradition of humanity, and if we do not guard against those kinds of excesses, then we will find ourselves in a very negative place in society.

So I think it's very important that when we create a school system, we make sure that that school system reflects the values that we have created in the rest of our society, the human rights that say: if you are a gay person, not only do you have all the rights of everybody who is not gay, but you have the right to express that gayness in the way that makes most sense to you as long as it does not hurt another person. That's what GSAs are all about. GSAs are about being able to express who you are without any harm to anyone else. That's all we're asking. We're just asking for the children that we have in our society to be brought up with the same values that have created the great abundance and wealth of opportunity that exist for the rest of us here in the province of Alberta.

That's what we're challenging now, that's what we're threatening now, and that's unacceptable. It's unacceptable for duly elected members of a parliamentary democracy to undermine . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a), I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member was in the middle of a thought, speaking to the effects of Bill 8, and I wonder if he might continue his thoughts on our duty in a parliamentary democracy to uphold basic human rights, our section 15 Charter rights, and the dignity of all people regardless of background, orientation, or other ascribed characteristics.

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

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to just summarize my remarks. I introduced my comments earlier as understanding that I would be describing my concerns with some hyperbole, that I understood that were I to simply say to this House, "You are supporting the scarification of our children," you would immediately have dismissed what I had to say.

But I think that if you'd listened to what I had to say, you would hear the danger in us not being aware that there are others out there who are more than fully prepared to engage in that kind of behaviour today in Canada, that people come from all parts of the world and that there are practices in some parts of the world where people's bodies are harmed, where people's human rights to the integrity of the body and to the self are violated on a regular basis. If I tell you that you are supporting a system which is going to make it possible for those people to create an enclave in which they will be able to continue that kind of practice, I think you will recognize

that the hyperbole is small and that the underlying concern and fear are legitimate.

When it's a practice that you find horrific, of course you as an elected member are going to say: that's terrible; I would never allow that to happen. But suddenly, when it's a practice that you don't find horrific, when it's accepted in your world view that people who are gay are not acceptable or somehow do not have human rights, are not allowed to practise and express those human rights in the way that they so desire, somehow it changes your response, and that's a concern, isn't it?

9:50

That's something that we have learned as a society to not allow ourselves to do. We have learned to say: it can't just be the things that I think are right or wrong, because then I simply become a dictator. It may be a dictatorship of the majority, it may be most of the people, but I can tell you that in the indigenous community, when that happened with residential schools, it was devastating. It was terrible and led to generations of trauma that continue to harm and undermine the health and well-being of our indigenous communities in the province of Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I guess I want to finish up by just cautioning the people in this House that if they continue to act on this bill without actually having concern for the combination of the things they're putting together, not simply the individual facts but the way they can be woven together by people with malevolent intent, then they are going to be unleashing on our society an undesirable characteristic which we have been working for many generations to expunge. I do not want to be part of a government that opens the door to that backward kind of thinking, that kind of belief system that results in a dictatorship by a majority, a tyranny of people who believe themselves to be right and who do not understand and therefore do not support or validate the truthfulness that lies in the world view of others.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. There are five seconds left under 29(2)(a), so if you're as brief as the Member for Lethbridge-West, you may have been able to ask a question.

Unfortunately, time has expired, but I do see the hon. Member for St. Albert rising to add some comments to the debate.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure, I suppose, to rise and speak to Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. Every time I rise to speak to something like this, I always think: jobs, pipeline, economy; what happened? You know, it's like bait and switch. It's like: no, no; we're going to focus on the economy, but, no, we're going to address this Education Act. Honestly, nobody is fooled. I think we saw this coming. A lot of Albertans saw this coming, and I imagine this is just the beginning of transforming Alberta and this particular Chamber according to somebody's world view.

Anyway, I'm going to focus on part of this amendment act, I guess a triage of sorts, and focus on the GSA bit. The reason I'm going to do that is that on May 3 I had 60 handwritten letters delivered to my constituency office from junior high students in St. Albert. I'm just going to read some of them to you because I think it's important that you hear their voices. You hear us speak all the time. Well, you probably don't listen, but we're here speaking all the time. I think that if you have the opportunity as a legislator, as an elected official here, it's your duty to listen to the children, to listen to our children, who are the future. They're trying to speak to

you. They're trying to say something. This isn't propaganda or politics. I didn't know they were writing them. They just wrote them, and they delivered them. They're pretty amazing young people, so I think you should listen to them.

To whom it may concern:

I personally think that parents do not need to be informed if [the] child is LGBTQ because not all children's parents think that being LGBTQ is okay and could try to make the child change. Another reason that teachers should not have to inform parents is that it's not fair that the kids don't get to open up to their parents. If a child is not comfortable with their parents knowing, don't tell them. The child will open up when they're more comfortable with their parents knowing. The reason I feel strongly about standing up for LGBTQ is [that] I'm bisexual and I feel [that] if my mom found out that I am bisexual, [she] wouldn't respect me, and she would want me to change. I feel that kids deserve the freedom to keep it to themselves that they're LGBTQ.

Then it says to flip the page, which I thought was awesome.

I would also like to point out that if an adult is LGBTQ and their parents don't know then why don't you tell their parents? People need to stop [bleeping] bossing kids around. We're people too. Thank you for your time. I hope that you take into consideration my note and make things right. I am bisexual so this means a lot to me and so many others so please open your . . . eyes and make the right choice!

And:

To whom it may concern:

I'm a member of the LGBTQ+ community. I have one question for you. Do you think that it is okay for us to take 20 steps backwards? We fought for our [own] voices to be heard. We want to be safe. Now you, our government, want us to stop being who we are. It is also a danger for us to be outed to our parents. Most people will respond badly . . . [some] people are homophobic. GSAs are a safe space and it is where we are heard and welcomed with opened arms. Just because you don't like what I'm saying doesn't mean I'll stop talking. I'll only talk louder until my voice is heard.

Sincerely, me.

Hello,

I am writing to you because I strongly disagree with your decision. School is supposed to be a safe and accepting place where kids can freely express themselves. As an asexual . . . female that participates in drag, I definitely do not feel safe at school as it is. Coming out to my friends was as hard as it is, and if teachers told my parents, I would be thought of differently, [and] I likely would be sent to live somewhere else.

I know kids my age get entirely disowned for coming out as queer, and most queer kids are horrified of what their parents might do to them. I know I am. My whole family is incredibly Catholic and follow their old ways. A young person came out as a transgender male in my class last month. Everyone was so supportive and it was beautiful to see how far society has come in these short years.

Let's imagine you get a call from your child's school. They have done something you strongly disagree with. This may be the reality of some youth.

I also think children should be educated in sexuality, gender identity, or romantic preference. I get teased and made fun of all the time just because of my sexuality. People accept gay and trans freely, but we aren't quite to the point where everyone is [as] accepted. I switched schools in fear of people finding out about my sexuality or romantic preference or gender identity. I'm still worried, but I'm glad I'm finally in a progressive school.

I just hope this isn't ruined for us.

Sincerely, [that] kid.

To whoever gets this letter:

Hello, I am a nonbinary, queer 13-year-old. I'm not a person to have strong opinions, but this is something I think a lot about.

Why are members of the LGBTQ-plus community allowed to be made fun of for something they have no choice about? Why do we have to come out? Why is that considered normal and accepted? I know you probably can't answer these questions, but they still have to be asked. It should be someone's own opinion on when it's time to come out, if they ever do. They shouldn't be forced to. They shouldn't be outed by a teacher to their unaccepting parents because they joined a club. It is who they are. I know it would be easier if everyone was accepting, but that isn't how it works, so just let kids choose for themselves. Let them decide when it's time.

From an angry 13-year-old.

I'm going to skip this one because the writing is really tiny.

To Mr. [Premier],

I believe that the students have a right to privacy and if they are part of the LGBTQ community . . . they should [still] have their own time that they [should] choose to "come out" to their parents and not find out through the government [or teachers]. Why would you want the parents to know if the child themselves hasn't told them? They don't feel safe letting their parents know yet, and you want to throw away that and make them know even when the kid doesn't want [their parents to know]. That's a violation of our privacy.

And:

Dear [Mr. Premier],

I believe that people who feel a certain way about the same gender should have their own time to come out to their parents, and not by a call home to the kid's parents. I think a lot of others can agree with me [in] that what you are doing is . . . bad. You shouldn't invade [someone's] feelings and tell their parents. I thought you would be a better Premier. Please rethink your ideas. I believe you can change [and] be good . . . [Please] change your plans.

10:00

Dear Mr. [Premier],

I'm a student at . . . [a] school in St. Albert. I'm not LGBTQ+, but there are people in my class who are, and I can comfortably say that it is not your place to out kids like that. That's their right, and I'm doing what I can to peacefully protest this change. You say you stand for your citizens, and the children and the LGBTQ+ youth are just as much your people as everybody else. I cannot support this change as I consider it a complete regression in how far we've come as an accepting community. I hope that you can see our side and what we stand for, and then make the decision to stand for all Albertans, not just some of them. People have the right to be who they want to be. The strongest thing I have [are] my words, consider myself and all the people this would affect don't have a vote [yet]. Young people are standing for young people, and I hope that's enough to change your mind.

Dear Government of Alberta,

We are 2 students from . . . [a] junior high . . . in St. Albert . . . We believe everybody should have a choice in who they are and what they believe in. This is why we are protesting the policy involving LGBTQ+ rights. We believe everybody should have the right to keep their identity confidential if they wish as it could lead to unsafe conditions for youth otherwise. This protest process is necessary to get our point across and to represent those who may not be able to do so themselves. If you were to not apply this policy, you would not only be respecting members of [the] LGBTQ+ [community] but everybody protesting the bill in Alberta.

Sincerely, a student.

To whom it may concern:

I feel there are many dangers in teachers telling parents if their children are in the LGBTQ+ community. Many parents are against the community and telling the parents could result in major consequences against the child such as being kicked out of

their home, being shunned by their parents or guardians. These effects on students are life changing and shouldn't be ignored.

Those are just a few of the 60 letters that I received, and each one of them is really different. They are a little bit upset about some other things, about test weighting, but primarily they were focused on GSAs. There were some that were really quite emotional, that shared some stories. I will table these tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

I guess why I wanted to read some of them – I'd actually like to read all of them, but I won't. I don't have time to do that. But what these children are telling you is that we've been out of school for a really long time. We've not needed a club like this, if any of us were involved with a club like this, for a very long time, and these students are telling us what life is like for them in junior high school. They just want a safe place. They want to know that their privacy will be respected and they're not going to be at risk for just seeking out other children, other kids and adults that are going to be nonjudgmental and are going to support them in whatever decisions they make, whatever they choose to share.

I think, you know, we've talked at length of the dangers of outing kids before they're ready. We've talked about how we know that far too many of these children – and they are children – end up on the street, end up homeless, end up dead by suicide, end up in really abusive situations. I think that if you could do something in this place to prevent one death, it would be worth it, just even one child, preventing one death. You can say all you like that this legislation brings in the strongest protection in Canada. It does not. It absolutely does not. I don't know what more proof you need. It just doesn't. I would ask you to think about it. Look in your community. If you could save one child, if you could prevent the injury or death of one child, wouldn't you do that? Wouldn't you do everything in your power to do that?

These are kids unprompted; there was no politics involved. They were unprompted. They took the time to write these letters and share personal stories about what their lives were like, what their friends' lives were like, and they don't get a voice in this place. They don't get to talk to us and to tell us what's important to them and what changes they want to see, so I was happy to read some of their letters, Mr. Speaker, because I think their voices need to be heard. I think that we saw a lot of students leave school peacefully for, I think, about 20 minutes not that long ago because they want to support themselves and their friends, and I think that this will continue because our children are our future, and they know that. They know that that's their power.

I think that we're seeing children all over the world that are leading the way and telling us, like: "Wake up. We have a problem with climate change. It is a climate crisis." You are seeing millions of children all over the world saying: "Pay attention. This is our future." We'll be gone. It'll be their future. I think that that's what these kids are saying. These kids in our communities are telling us: "Stop what you're doing. It's dangerous. Basically, you know, butt out. Let us have our clubs. Let us be safe. Let us know that whatever we do here, talking to our friends or a supportive adult or teacher, we don't run the risk of having information going back to our parent or guardians, information that we know can cause harm to us and our future."

I don't know. I mean, what else is there to say about this? We keep hearing the same things from the government side, that this is the strongest protection for this community. It is not. We brought in additional protection because we knew that there were problems and that people were dragging their feet. People were afraid to use words like "gay." I don't know what's wrong with saying the word "gay." It's just a word. It's just a word. Gay, gay, gay, gay, gay. I mean, really, it's a word.

Think about it. When you vote, when it comes down to it and you vote on this legislation, know that in the future when something

happens – because we know it will. You know what the risk is for these kids. It will happen. You know what? You're going to have to own up to your part in this, that you had the information in front of you, you knew what was going on, you knew what the kids were saying, you knew what educators were saying, and you chose to turn the other way and look away. That'll be on you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall rising to ask a brief question or make a comment.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for your remarks and for sharing the stories of young people from your riding.

Certainly, young people are trying their best to get heard. They're doing so in many different ways – writing letters, protesting out here, outside the Legislature, protesting outside city hall – and they are trying their best to protect their education system and protect the safeguards that were in place in the Education Act.

I do know that the Member for St. Albert has spent her life advocating for those who are marginalized, those who depend on government services, and those who need supports from government to be successful and be included in society, so I would want the member to elaborate a bit further on how this piece of legislation is taking us away from inclusion and how it's effectively excluding certain groups. It also takes out reference to specialized support, so what impact will it have on those vulnerable youth who may have been differently abled, who may have disabilities? If the member would like to expand on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can imagine, I think, that a number of school-aged children also are part of the LGBTQ-plus community and may also have a disability. It's a struggle enough to be included in school, not just physically included but included in everyday activities and education. Add to that another component where they are struggling, perhaps, with their own identity as it relates here. It's not unheard of, and it's not unusual.

10:10

But, you know, the Member for Calgary-McCall brought up something that just sort of reminded me of a question I asked the Premier, I think it was a week or two ago, about how he defined inclusion, and then the people that I asked after that sort of repeated his answer. How he defined inclusion was: celebrating diversity. I suppose if you're at a ceremony to celebrate diversity, you could call it that, but I think what is key, what he missed and what his ministers also missed, is that inclusion requires action every single day. It requires a plan. It requires resources. It requires an understanding. It requires people to work on it together not just somebody saying: well, this is inclusion; this is the way we're going to go, and this is how we're going to evaluate it.

Real inclusion brings everyone to the table, and they ask. You figure out together what that looks like, and then you work at it because it's never over. It's a process that requires constant effort and constant investment in energy and resources. That's what inclusion for people with disabilities requires, and that's what inclusion for this particular group requires. I would suggest that the first step to inclusion here is listening to the children.

You know, it's just like the other night when we were talking. I mean, it was so bizarre to me that we were spending the whole night talking about a bill to reduce the minimum the wage of youth. It

was a bunch of people that make \$150,000 a year talking about the value of reducing the minimum wage by \$2 for youth. Here we are talking about a bill that has the potential to harm people, and we have young people saying: "Don't do it. It's the wrong thing to do. This is not what you should do. Listen to us. We're scared. This will happen. This is our life." Yet, still the government wants to say: "No. We're bringing in strong protection. We're bringing in the strongest protection in Canada." You're not. You're just not. You can look down all you like and look away, but you're not. You are putting children at risk, not to mention the other changes brought in under this legislation. I'm simply focusing on one piece of it that is hugely problematic and frightening for children.

On that, I will sit down. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, those wishing to speak to Bill 8. The Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Normally I would say that it's my pleasure to rise to speak to a bill. Under normal circumstance, if these were routine amendments to the Education Act or perhaps in some way, shape, or form modernized our approach to the education system, I would be pleased to speak to this bill. But I am not. I am profoundly annoyed to have to stand and speak to this bill because it is shocking that after all of the progress that we have made around Bill 24 and around protecting kids in this province, we are now going to take a step back. If we're going to take a step backwards, then let's zoom out a little bit and talk about how social struggle manifests itself in the education system and then a little bit about basic human rights.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, we see that some of the main questions of our time swirl around education policy. We see this not only in this country, but we see it in other countries. We see the policy of trying to "take the Indian out of the child," which was the saying at the time manifesting itself through the residential system. Canada's shameful history of colonialism expressed itself through a school system. We see that over the course of time it used to be that women didn't have an education past about grade 8, grade 10, or so because the expectation was: what was the point? They needed to learn how to do basic sums to run the household budget, and then they were just going to get married and have kids, so what was the point?

In fact, my own mom tells a story about – she was really good at math, probably still is – wanting to go and study to be a veterinarian. Her own dad was a big proponent of education. He was, in fact, the chair of the school board, as I understand it, and brought the high school to that area. I remember my mom always telling me the story that he said: "No. Women are teachers or nurses." So my mom never got to be a veterinarian. She was a teacher instead. She taught physics, which was a pretty unfeminine thing to do, but that's where the math skills went, the math and science skills.

The education system has reflected some of our better tendencies and some of our worse tendencies. The basic value here that we are talking about is our section 15 Charter rights, our basic rights to be free from discrimination on certain characteristics. It was indeed the 1997 Vriend decision, again, a decision that came out of a teacher in an education system, in this case the postsecondary system, that read sexual orientation into section 15 of the Charter, it then being a prohibited ground. I will note just as a sidebar, Mr. Speaker, our guarantee to be free from discrimination based on sexual orientation: on that Vriend decision, the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon as recently as a couple of years ago argued that teachers should be allowed to be fired for sexual orientation. Thankfully, the 1997 Vriend decision, that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed called a virus, has been made and it's been upheld in various forms in the intervening two decades.

The basic human rights proposition remains the same. This is not something that is in our ancient history. Although I often tell the story – when I spoke to Bill 24, I told the story of growing up in a small town west of Edmonton that isn't so small anymore. I described my high school as being aggressively homophobic, and it was. The first person who ever came out to me – I was 17. We were in grade 12. I have his permission to tell this story. I won't use his name. I remember him saying to me and my three girlfriends at the time: "Do not tell anyone. They will kill me. They will kill me." There was a pretty serious look on his face, and I had no reason not to believe him because I had also had my ears open from my time in high school.

We didn't have at that time any kind of GSA. It was not even heard of. This is ancient history. I'm very old. There was a lot of different kinds of bullying and intimidation that went on, and there was no place for students to be able to access any kind of support for that. What we also know about GSAs is that it's not – there's a "straight" in there, Mr. Speaker. We know that these kinds of clubs and these kinds of meeting spaces reduce bullying, intimidation, and discrimination of all forms and for all kids, and they make the entire school atmosphere safer. They're not just about LGBT kids although they are about gay kids. And you can say "gay." There's nothing wrong with that, and I don't know why the Minister of Education can't even bring herself to say the word. It's only three little letters.

We have these provisions because of our section 15 Charter rights. This is not an old-time problem to be solved. It is a problem right now in communities across this province everywhere that people are discriminated against based on their sexual orientation. When sexual orientation first begins to present itself in the teenage and older years, that is when people need the most support, and that is when some of that peer support can be the most meaningful in people's lives. The evidence shows that peer to peer, with adult support, is the most effective way of saving people's lives, of making the whole school safe so that people can go to school to do what actually the education system is for, which is to reach our full potential as individuals and exercise our individual liberty.

#### 10:20

It never ceases to amaze me that Conservatives can't get their heads around a basic fundamental piece of conservatism, which is individual liberty, individual liberty to be free from discrimination and free to express oneself however they want. I know – I know – that there are people across the way who share my views, who are scratching their heads as to why, after being elected on a jobs, economy, and pipeline platform, all of a sudden we are making a beeline for young people's rights. I know that there are members across the way who are having a little bit of reckoning time to deal with this. But I also know that there are members across the way who feel very strongly that we should take away the immediacy and the confidentiality of children's rights, of young people's rights to avail themselves of a peer support group in a school atmosphere.

I would encourage those who have problems with this to speak out, both at caucus and in cabinet. We know that some folks have a profound discomfort with this. We know it because they've done things like put it in writing and put it on the record. For example, the Member for Calgary-Elbow and Minister of Justice has written to his supporters. In the past few weeks members of the LGBTQ community have publicly invited the Member for Calgary-Lougheed to meet with them on multiple occasions. Even former PC Education minister Gordon Dirks spoke out that similar meetings he took were helpful to him to better understand the importance of GSAs in protecting vulnerable youth. That was a missive sent by the now Minister of Justice to his supporters. He

put it in writing that there were problems with his own leader's approach to gay-straight alliances.

How about this one, Mr. Speaker? We have the now Minister of Transportation urging people just over a year ago to reject this very GSA policy, this very policy on suspending the immediacy of people's ability to join or form a GSA and the confidentiality associated with it that our government brought in, rejecting this very policy that is under consideration by this House right now because this policy is – this is the Minister of Transportation's quote, not mine – outing gay kids and results in the UCP becoming, quote, a lake of fire party; don't be called a lake of fire party, I am begging you.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have people begging for Bill 8 not to present itself in the Legislature, yet here we are. Clearly there's a very strong appetite amongst the Premier and his inner circle to railroad any hon. members who may have questions about this bill and push through this highly objectionable approach to people's basic human rights. I can appreciate that not all members may have had a chance to provide that feedback yet to Executive Council and to the Premier's office staff, who seem full steam ahead on this. I can appreciate that maybe they haven't had time yet given that it has happened so quickly. I would beg those private members to continue to communicate with the Premier's office, because constituents do care about this issue, and I know that many hon. members across the way do want to uphold the honour of representing their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move on a little bit and talk about the comments that I got after speaking to Bill 24, a bill that I was happy to speak to. I am less happy today. I got a large card from a neighbour who had a community QSA that had formed through the Boys & Girls Club during the time of uncertainty.

In southern Alberta sometimes that uncertainty is not just a mild discomfort, but it actually puts kids at risk. When I go and tour places like Wood's homes in Lethbridge, there are pride flags and trans flags kind of everywhere. When I toured it a couple of years back, I asked why that was, and the staff there said: oh, well, a good majority of the kids who find themselves homeless and then find themselves at our door, availing themselves of our services, are LGBT, and they've been kicked out. That's the reality for many people in my community.

I got a big card after speaking to Bill 24 because as part of their QSA they watched some of the speeches. You know, people do watch, Mr. Speaker, and constituents do care. It's a big card. It's about this big, and it's still in my office. It certainly brought me to tears because the individual comments from at that time 16- and 17-year-olds – those folks are now voters, my friends – were at once heartbreaking and inspiring. They said things like: I never thought that I would have anyone elected who spoke for me and who represented me; I never thought I would have an elected representative who understood what it meant to be an LGBT youth.

I don't, but it is my job to speak here on behalf of those struggles because I understand that there are struggles, and my allyship is not an entitlement, as some folks have sort of alleged across the way, that just by virtue of the office people should be nice to them. No. No. Allyship is not an entitlement. One is not entitled to be adjacent to pride, to be part of pride, any of that. Pride is a struggle, it is political, and only through voicing values that are shared with that community do you earn the right to be anywhere near it, to wrap yourself in anyone's flag.

What that card said to me was that, one, folks are watching. Folks are watching. Some of the comments in that card specifically referenced the previous debates that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora talked about when she walked us through some of the political history. In other words, when those kids were, like,

10, 12 years old, they were paying attention. They're watching us. We need to be accountable to them.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for a brief question or comment.

**Ms Hoffman:** It will be, guaranteed, five minutes or less, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you so much to the Member for Lethbridge-West for walking us through some of that history. One of the things she said early on in her remarks reminded me to do some googling. Vriend versus Alberta: we often talk about Vriend and the successful case, but it started with Vriend versus Alberta, right? Like, it was the province, the government, the people of this province represented by the government, attacking the rights of a minority individual who was fired from his job.

Vriend versus Alberta: what it made me think about is the fact that Doug Stollery was chief counsel on Vriend versus Alberta. Doug Stollery is now the chancellor at the U of A. Doug Stollery took it all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and won this landmark case, I'd say, for equal rights here in this country. He also happens to be a member serving on the conversion therapy working group, certainly somebody who has a legal background, a very distinguished career there, somebody who's very respected for his contributions to the community at large. Certainly, the Stollery family has given so much to all Alberta families, I would argue, and to many from other provinces who come here for the amazing support they receive through the Stollery children's hospital here in Edmonton.

I wonder if the member might be willing to talk a little bit about the Vriend decision and the conversion therapy working group and intersections that she might see there in the attack on sexual orientation and gender identity, minority rights, gay rights. Thank you.

10:30

**The Speaker:** Well, a brief question or comment, indeed.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West is rising to answer.

**Ms Phillips:** Yeah. I mean, the Vriend decision was one of the first Charter decisions that ever caught my eye. I was, I think, in second-year university, and I remember the day that the decision came out. My friend, who was a lesbian, was walking down the street holding hands with her girlfriend, and because the issue had been in the news, I think people's tempers were a little flared. She got spat on that day, and that was on Whyte Avenue. That was in 1997. Again, this is not old-timey history. This is now.

Discrimination happens, and that's why we need things like section 15, and that's why we need sexual orientation to be read into section 15, and that is why the court found it to be so. The court then also found, for example, the right to marry in the 2005 reference, again, that was vehemently opposed by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and others, I'm sure, in this Chamber.

The fact of the matter is that our Charter rights have been upheld, our rights to security of the person, to individual liberty. That goes for conversion therapy, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is a question of: does the individual have sovereignty over how they take decisions, over how they approach matters of faith, how they approach their intimate relationships, how they approach how they are going to navigate the oftentimes complex questions of gender identity? The individual before the law is sacrosanct, and this has been upheld time and again.

It has also been upheld through our section 7 rights on the security of the person. For the women in this room, that particular decision in 1988 may interest them because that is the decision that

guarantees our reproductive freedoms. Again, the liberty of the individual to take decisions in their own best interests is supposed to be that question of liberty, supposed to be a cornerstone of conservative thought but, like so many things, is subject to a great deal of both hypocrisy and convenient thinking, especially these days, in this moment of the life of conservatism in this country and elsewhere.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've talked about our legal rights. I have talked about examples where I know that GSAs would have helped. I've talked about examples of kids who are in GSAs or QSAs right now and what they see us doing and how they see us speaking for them or not. The only thing I will say is that they will continue to do that and they're not going to be protesting at my constituency office. I can guarantee you that.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to debate?

I might just remind members that if they would like to have conversations outside of the debate, perhaps they might like to use any one of the lounges that are available to you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is rising.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased once again to rise to speak to Bill 8 in this Chamber. I want to pay particular thanks to the Member for St. Albert, who really brought home the crux of this debate by reading into the record a number of letters written by young people who self-identified in their letters as members of the LGBTQ community, who would be directly affected and in the line of fire of Bill 8 and the proposals therein.

Now, it's instructive to know that at the Youth Empowerment & Support Services, otherwise known by its acronym, YESS, at any given time more than 30 per cent of the youth residents there who've sought shelter have been students who were kicked out of their own homes because their own families didn't accept their sexuality. The result, of course, is that these children, young people, are homeless. They're seeking shelter, but they're homeless. They're out of their own home. They're despondent. Ultimately, many are on the street. They're vulnerable to pimps, drugs, prostitution, suicide, and other forms of violent death, which is what these people face if they're not able to come out in a way that's safe to their own families when they know that their own families have a real difficult time comprehending the human rights necessity to accept the sexuality of their children.

It's very astounding to me and maybe to other members across the floor that this is happening right here in our cities in this province, but it is on a daily basis, Mr. Speaker, and that's right at the heart of the matter. The letters that were brought forward on the record by the Member for St. Albert I think showed and demonstrated, more clearly than anything any member in this House can say, the fears that these young people feel for their lives in not having a safe, protected place, within their school, where they won't be outed, to come out and learn how to find a way to discuss their sexuality with their parents and ultimately find the acceptance they desire, to maintain that family bond rather than facing the ostracism that they know exists at the moment.

Organizations like YESS are really to be commended for giving shelter to those individuals who are at risk, as I mentioned, of being on the streets and vulnerable to pimps, drugs, prostitution, suicide, and other forms of violent death. We know that these GSAs have saved lives. Undermining them will do the opposite. It will result in young people dying. I know the Member for St. Albert is intent, along with the members on this side of the House and, I hope, all members of this House, on protecting the lives of young people who are critically vulnerable in facing the decision as to how to come out to their own family in a way that allows that family to remain



intact, to find the language and the tools and the support to help them bridge the gap that exists between them and their family members.

Mr. Speaker, not all families have the acceptance levels necessary to allow a young person who is a member of the LGBTQ2S-plus community to feel comfortable coming forward. It's not a matter of giving choice to parents. It's a matter of providing a safe spot for these young people to come out so that when they do decide to make that commitment and reveal their sexuality to their parents, it is done in a way that will hopefully keep that family unit intact and allow a real communication and a dignified communication between those parents who don't fully comprehend what's going on with their child and the young adult or the young child who needs the assistance of peers as well as professionals in terms of a teacher who can help guide that individual to a place where they feel they are equipped and prepared to come out to their parents.

Undermining these GSAs, as has been said so eloquently by the Member for St. Albert and many others in this Chamber, especially on this side of the House, is a very, very wrong-headed move. It's a move that will not only be unhealthy. We've said in no uncertain terms – and I think the facts are incontrovertible – that we will be putting young peoples' lives at risk, and some people who otherwise might have lived a fruitful, healthy life after properly communicating their sexual orientation to their families will end up dead. That's the long and the short of it.

I'd like to thank the Member for St. Albert for those very, very heartfelt letters that she read into the record. I couldn't think of a stronger and more potent testimony to the value of the GSAs that we brought into force. To go backwards in time, to not recognize the value of these young people and the importance of providing them with a bridging mechanism to come out to their family is a shameful indictment of the government on this issue. I hope that the public outrage will be enough to cause them to backtrack and realize that this is a mistaken policy and that they decide that they will amend their legislation to get rid of at least this piece of Bill 8, which is a tragedy.

Thank you.

10:40

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for brief questions or comments if anyone has any of the member. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is rising to ask a brief question or comment.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to our Member for Edmonton-McClung for speaking to this very important issue and sharing his thoughts on Bill 8 this evening. My question to him was just if he'd heard from constituents or had conversations with members of the LGBTQ2S community in his time as a legislator, given the debates that have been had in the past on Bill 24 and seeing some of these issues return to the Legislature again now.

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

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for the question. I must say that as a member of the NDP caucus, now in opposition and then formerly, of course, in government, it would have been impossible not to have had conversations with members of the LGBTQ community because they knew they had an ally in this caucus, whether in government or in opposition.

That was evidenced in the attendance at any event that we held to honour and respect and show the dignity to the LGBTQ2S-plus

community that they deserved, whether it be a flag raising of the pride flag – we had people from the community in droves. We certainly had, I would say, hundreds. I don't know if there was a member of the LGBTQ2S-plus community who didn't come door-knocking with us during the last election campaign because, you know, they understood that lives depended on it. It was super important to that community. That's why we're here now advocating on their behalf once again, because we know directly, first-hand, how important it was to the community.

Of course, we have our one lone MLA gay, ML-gay, who is in the Legislature proudly advocating as well. We hope to see those numbers increase in subsequent elections, but for now we'll be proudly standing next to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and making sure that that voice is as strong as possible and multiplied by ours at every opportunity because this is not something, Mr. Speaker, that can go by the wayside. This is an important issue. I think all Albertans are watching not only how we perform; I think they expect us to follow through on our commitment to the LGBTQ-plus community. We well established our credibility on that file. It's something that we could never even dream of going backwards on.

We're doing our very best to gather public approval for our resistance to Bill Hate, as we refer to it. It's a bill that reflects an underlying misunderstanding and a very frightening lack of respect for the need of the LGBTQ2S-plus community to be protected, to be protected from those who would otherwise out them as students in school, who would suggest that they don't have the right as young people to come out at a time of their choosing.

That condescending attitude, to say it lightly, is something that will become and is already becoming reflected in street behaviour in this city, where you'll find people walking down Edmonton streets, three abreast, wearing colours of white supremacist groups, pushing people out of the way, expecting their way to be cleared. And you'll find it in other jurisdictions in the western world, where two lesbian women, for example, on a bus in London, I believe it was, were repeatedly smashed in the face because they refused to kiss at the demands of some absolutely abhorrent young people who were thugging their way into their lives. That is unbelievable evidence of the type of thing that is creeping into public discourse. We're not going to be immune to that type of tragic discourse, Mr. Speaker, and that's one of the things we need to combat.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, anyone else wishing to rise and debate today? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo rising.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, believe that Bill Hate is disappointing on so many levels. I believe it deliberately waters down the previous Bill 24, that was working for the majority. Youth, in particular GSA and QSA youth, were supported by Bill 24.

This Bill Hate, the Education Act amendment, will not be this Legislature's finest hour, Mr. Speaker. The 30th Legislature will be known, I believe, in the future, when people look back at it, as a socially conservative, activist Legislature, and I don't think the majority of Albertans are like that anymore. The 29th Legislature, I would think – and I don't think I'm just giving it, you know, a good spin – will be known as an environmental Legislature that updated labour laws, the MGA, and other big pieces of legislation that had been left untouched for a great long time. The work of this Legislature, even in its early days, I think, is moving things backwards.

I just want to touch a little bit on, you know, my own growing up, Mr. Speaker. I was in junior high school and high school in the

late '60s and early '70s to the mid-70s. I grew up with many kids who I found out many years later were gay, but they were closeted the whole time they were in school, the schools that I went to. It was obviously not a safe place for them to be out. In later years some individuals that I kept in touch with would often tell me that they didn't have support in school, and those young people, obviously, weren't able to live their lives with the support of caring adults who created environments in their schools to make them feel comfortable. In fact, there was a great deal of discomfort shown to anyone who was not straight and a jock. The fact that people had to hide themselves from others was not that era's finest hour.

The retrenchment of the work that Bill 24 has put in place to address the needs of – I'm not sure whose needs are being addressed in this way, Mr. Speaker. Like, who is being listened to with regard to Bill Hate coming forward? It certainly can't be young people in schools. It's got to be other people. I would put it to the group over there: who's talking to you about needing to roll back protections for kids in schools? It's not kids. It can't be kids. They wouldn't be that cruel.

10:50

My own approach to life and living, Mr. Speaker: live your own life, don't impinge on other people's lives, live and let live, and accept people where they're at. This Bill Hate does not do that. It says that you have to be certain ways, and if you're not those certain ways, then you're not going to get comfort and support in the education system, the kinds of securities that are put in place already.

My question opposite – I guess I would just place it again – is: who have they been listening to who is pushing for the retrenchment of the safe places for youth who are questioning their sexual identity in schools, which is taking place today? Who is being listened to? It certainly isn't young people, and if it's not young people themselves, I'd submit that the people who are being heard most probably shouldn't have the loudest voices in this regard. We should be listening to the young people.

Mr. Speaker, I also read over Bill Hate again, and just looking at page 7, to move on to some exceptions from section 33, it says:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by order, exempt an accredited private school or a class of accredited private schools from the operation of all or part of section 33.

Then when you go to the existing act and see what 33(1) is all about, it says:

A board, as a partner in education, has a responsibility to . . .

- (e) provide a continuum of specialized supports and services to students that is consistent with the principles of inclusive education.

What this bill is actually doing is saying that the principles of inclusive education: private schools and a class of accredited schools can be exempted from those.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it seems like it's a step back, certainly for young people who need the supports of inclusive education. I think what that means is – in my own family my young nephew has Down syndrome, and he has been going to schools along with other kids in his neighbourhood, and he's been supported in those schools with specialized supports. It looks to me like the principles of inclusive education are being removed from accredited private schools or a class of accredited private schools. I don't think it's a step forward.

Then there's another part here that talks about striking out "specialized," and it's at the bottom of page 7. When you go over to the part in the bill that it talks to, it says:

ensure that the student is provided with specialized supports and services in accordance with section 33(1)(e).

This act is actually striking out "specialized" and watering that down so it would read: provide with supports and services in

accordance with section 33(1)(e). Who does that benefit, Mr. Speaker? It's not the young person in the school.

Additionally, there's a removal of striking out "a director" and substituting "a child intervention worker." The current act, the way it reads is:

On hearing a matter referred to it, the Attendance Board may, subject to any terms or conditions that the Attendance Board considers proper in the circumstances, make an order doing one or more of the following [things] . . .

- (d) reporting the matter to a director under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

This is watering that down and saying that the director can be replaced by a child intervention worker.

Now, I've worked in social service agencies, worked with child welfare. I know that a director is higher than a child intervention worker, and I know that a director has a lot more stroke than one of their employees, so I wonder again: who is benefiting from this removal and watering down of the current act? It's not the child, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing I'd like to say with regard to the watering down of QSAs and GSAs is – I've read the whole bill, and it removes or waters down QSAs and GSAs by stealth, Mr. Speaker, because there's not one mention of what this government is doing with respect to that. It's probably buried under, you know: a section is amended by striking out the whole section in the current act. That seems very, very untransparent, and I think that the members opposite would agree that this Education Act amendment is not transparent in that regard.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the section where trustees can be banished from their own boards by other trustees is frankly shocking. I've been on five city councils and now in two Legislatures, and I have never, never seen that level of – I don't know what the word is. It's like reaching in and throwing a potential grenade into a council or a board of trustees or the Legislature.

There are ways to work these things out that council members have long used. The kind of thing they do, Mr. Speaker, is that if there's a council member who has gone off the rails and is acting in ways that are abhorrent to other council members – and I've been on some of those councils – you just stop working with that person. You freeze them out. You say, you know, "Your actions need to change, or we'll stop participating with Notices of Motions with you, with work on committees with you," and they quickly get the message that if they want anything to occur, if they want eight votes of council – I was on a council of 15 – they have to come around.

If they don't come around, Mr. Speaker, then you simply vote no when they bring things forward. That's how you deal with a council member or a trustee who is trying to do things that aren't in the best interests of the young people that they're there to serve or the constituents of the ward you represent. I've seen that action before, and it shapes people up pretty quickly. I've never been on that receiving end, but I do know that you have to watch yourself. If you want to get things done, you have to work together, and that's how you deal with people who won't do the things that they need to do to represent their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I think that there are lots of good reasons for this bill to be brought back and changed so that we actually have something going forward that meets the needs of Albertans and kids in school in particular. I just don't see where the work has been done to make that happen. In fact, I think this is a reaction bill to promises made on the campaign trail, not in the best interests of young people. I don't know, as I've said, who was being listened to, but certainly in the case of QSAs/GSAs it wasn't the youth who were in those GSAs. It wasn't the teachers and others in schools who were supporting the young people in those QSAs and GSAs.

11:00

I've been to several schools in my riding, Mr. Speaker, not specifically to attend a QSA or a GSA, but the young people in those schools – and I'm thinking mostly of high schools – have a lot more comfort with the whole area of sexuality than, I can tell you, I and my cohort had when we were in the late '60s and early '70s and I was in high school and junior high school. With that, you know, I have a lot more trust that they're on the right path. They are being supported to be on that right path, and I think the adults in this room, frankly, have a lot to learn from those young people.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for brief questions or comments to the member if anyone has one.

Seeing none, are there any others wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against the introduced Bill Hate, an act to destroy gay-straight alliances, that has come before us in debate this evening. One of my key concerns – and in my remarks at second reading I think I will speak to some of the overarching themes. There is a lot in the changes to the Education Act and the larger package, but at this point I think I'll stick to two main pieces of this legislation, specifically the impact to LGBTQ students. Because of my time as a member of the government caucus during the debate of Bill 24, I have had the opportunity to talk to constituents and stakeholders who've had direct experience with GSAs and QSAs, so I'd like to speak to that. Then, secondly, the other big change I'd like to speak to tonight is the ability for duly elected trustees to be removed. There are certainly a lot more changes to this bill, and in further debate I look forward to the opportunity to talk more about some of the other changes that are being brought in.

This Bill Hate can be called that act to destroy gay-straight alliances specifically because the government has chosen to make changes to how GSAs can be formed and the protections that students who wish to participate in GSAs are afforded by going back to an old piece of legislation, proclaiming and amending that, rather than trying to have a very upfront and honest conversation about the change that they're trying to afford. I also find that the government has been making very factually untrue statements regarding the strength of the protections that will be afforded to our LGBTQ students. This came up directly during our question period today, but with the introduction of Bill Hate, Alberta students will not have the strongest protections in Canada when it comes to making sure that they will not be outed, making sure that they have the right to form these gay-straight alliances in their schools and get the support that they need.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Keep in mind: what are we talking about? I'd like to go back to the fundamentals. We are talking about peer-support networks run by students, supported by school staff, and grounded in promoting equity for gender and sexual minority students; safe, caring and inclusive spaces for all students; healthy, respectful environments and relationships to prevent or eliminate bullying and discrimination; peer support being the key word because these are students helping other students in what can be very difficult times in their lives.

As someone who was not a gender minority student or a sexual minority student, high school was still tough for me. Adding those things on top is a lot to put on a young person. Making sure that somebody who is in the LGBTQ community is choosing when they choose to come out, how they choose to come out, and that they are supported is incredibly important. We know that because members of the LGBTQ2S community disproportionately suffer homelessness and other issues.

For this I'd like to go to our LGBTQ2S Youth Housing and Shelter Guidelines, that the government of Alberta has put out, because I think and I know that in conversations that I had with parents concerned when I was door-knocking, there are a lot of people who don't realize that we are talking about a vulnerable population because LGBTQ2S youth

experience higher incidents of homelessness, mental health issues and suicide rates than their non-LGBTQ2S counterparts.

Research [shows]:

- Nearly one in three homeless youth in Canada identify as LGBTQ2S.
- LGBTQ2S youth identify the primary reason for homelessness as family rejection due to gender identity or sexual orientation.
- LGBTQ2S homeless youth face higher rates of discrimination, violence and abuse in the shelter system than their non-LGBTQ2S counterparts.
- LGBTQ2S youth are at a higher risk of mental health concerns and self-harm and exhibit higher rates of suicidality than the general population.
- Lack of acknowledgement or awareness of LGBTQ2S youth has led to inappropriate responses by front-line workers, adding to the marginalization of this group.

That last line is more about why there is a specific guide for LGBTQ2S youth, because they tend to need the social supports and the support network that government can provide more often.

When we're talking about GSA policies, I really want us to think about the youth who need these protections most, not the majority but the few who are trying to get by, who need that peer-support network to talk to someone. The rejection from a disapproving principal or school administrator or even other classmates can have devastating impacts. Because throughout a lot of the discussion that we've had in this Chamber so far in our 30th Legislature, I worry that we are losing sight of who we are talking about. We are talking about a minority who is vulnerable. If we don't listen to what they have to say through letters, like have been read out this evening, or through e-mails that get sent to our offices or through one-on-one conversations at the many pride events that are going on around our province, then we are at risk of doing a huge disservice – not a disservice. Honestly, we're at risk of harm or death because of those higher rates of suicide. That makes that really, really important.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The parallel between thinking about who we're talking about: we're also talking a lot in this Legislature about youth minimum wage. The minister has taken to standing up and talking about how this is only the minimum and that lots of people will pay higher than this. But we're losing sight of who we're talking about. We need to talk about who this policy is going to directly impact. When we come to a youth minimum wage, we're talking about the youth who is going to be forced to have to take \$13 an hour.

When we're talking about Bill Hate, we're talking about the youth that is desperately looking for support through a peer-support group. Now Bill Hate may make that harder for them not in some theoretical way but in a way that we know actually has happened in this province and will continue to happen if there are not strong protections that protect the immediacy and make sure that there is no chance that a student will be outed. Because without the immediacy, students can be stonewalled, can be stalled. They can find the process very, very frustrating. Perhaps they are told that they can't have a student-led peer-support, teacher-supported club that has the name "gay" in it. A number of difficulties can come about. If they don't have the protections from being outed, then students necessarily won't even try to start a club. If there's any risk to themselves, they won't do that, and we've seen that.

11:10

Now, the culture around gay-straight alliances and how they've been used to support students I think is really important. I haven't had a chance to go through everything, but I hope to be able to revisit this in future debate. There are a number of scholarly articles and research being done on gay-straight alliances and, specifically, from my initial survey, research showing the incredibly positive impact they have not only on students who come from the LGBTQ2S community but also straight allies who participate in these clubs. I know I heard my colleagues talking about the importance of gay-straight alliances not only for the students but for the entire school community and the positive impact it can have on teachers as well. I think these are important considerations that we should be taking into account.

As we continue to discuss this bill and the risks that it poses to our community members in the province, the risks that it poses to vulnerable young people, it's very important that we always bring that back to who this actually impacts and thinking about those most vulnerable students and the protections that they deserve.

Now, during Bill 24 debate in the 29th Legislature I had the opportunity to talk to a number of members of the LGBTQ2S community as well as receiving their correspondence at my office. I hope to be able to bring some of that to read because I think that was incredibly powerful when my colleague from St. Albert was able to read into the record some of those items. Making sure that those voices are heard here in this Chamber is incredibly important.

I've had the opportunity to attend a number of events where members of the community have come to speak to me, including during the election when a teacher who is helping to run a GSA in our city came out to volunteer and spoke very passionately about how upset the students were that some of the protections could be repealed and that it was causing a lot of stress and harm just that the debate might come up. Of course, we were talking in the election. We didn't know what was going to happen. Of course, the UCP was running on their platform of jobs, economy, pipeline, yet here we are discussing Bill Hate. So obviously those students' fears had some grounding in reality. But it was incredibly touching to hear this teacher talk about the concern that was being raised from these students and the fear. The idea that students might not seek out a peer-support group because they're afraid is deeply upsetting to me, knowing the positive impact that GSAs, QSAs can have in the lives of these students. That is my primary concern at this point with Bill Hate.

I am also concerned about the idea that duly elected public officials in the form of school trustees could be removed from their positions by a majority who are not supportive of that individual member. As we get into further bill debate, I certainly hope to hear from the minister and other members of the government caucus why this is considered important in this bill and in what scenarios they envision it being used. Have they thought through the potential negative impacts to various communities if a dissenting voice is removed in that trustee position?

I think that's a really important failing in this bill. We need to be able to fully understand not only, "Okay, why did the government think this needs to be put in?" but I really, strongly disagree with putting in that language at all. I think it leads us down a very dangerous path when it comes to making sure that the voices that citizens elect are there and able to do their jobs even if the things they say are not always well received by everybody listening. I think that's really, really important.

My main concerns on Bill Hate, Mr. Speaker, are the fact that we are turning back the clock on protections, we are weakening protections students already have, something we know that students are concerned about, something I personally have had many

conversations with students about. I'm very pleased that I was in the Chamber this evening so that I could hear so many powerful statements by my colleagues, including our ML-gay, whose perspective I appreciate very much having in this caucus, and the others who were part of the Bill 24 debate and discussions, that were very important and held during the 29th Legislature.

As we move forward, I hope that we can continue to have these important debates without devolving into misinformation, which is something we saw happening around Bill 24, making sure that we can be honest about what this bill does and doesn't do and who it impacts. Again, I will bring us right back around to: we need to be thinking about the most vulnerable students. When you're thinking about, "Who does this potentially negatively impact, these changes?" I want you to think about someone who could be removed from their family home if they were outed, someone who may need supports for mental health issues, or someone who might be at risk of committing suicide. That's who we're here to fight for, and I appreciate that opportunity tonight, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anyone wishing to make a brief question or comment?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to Bill 8. Similar to my caucus members, I have a number of concerns with this bill, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, which has been characterized by my caucus colleagues as Bill Hate because, you know, quite frankly, it's undoing protections that our government brought in for the LGBTQ2S-plus community in addition to other things.

I know that the government and the Minister of Education characterize this as bringing in the act that wasn't proclaimed back in 2012. Really, this is a completely gutted version of that, minus the fact that it's an attack on the rights of our youth and of our students, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to talk a little bit from my point of view as a teacher. You know, there are a lot of new members in this House, and I don't know if they knew that I was a high school teacher for a number of years before I got into politics. Again, I was very fortunate to teach at a school that was very inclusive and accepting. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that providing students with the opportunity to have a safe space – I never understood, and I was in this House back when a former MLA, Kent Hehr, first brought in I believe it was a motion, which was back in 2014, calling on the government to protect GSAs. It was voted down by the two parties, the PCs and the Wildrose, and then in November of that year a former MLA, Laurie Blakeman, tabled private member's Bill 202.

Now, that was interesting. I remember that the government intentionally introduced another bill because you can't have two bills with the same concept or theme or amendments to legislation at the same time. So it torpedoed Laurie Blakeman's bill, and that was intentional. I know that there are some members in here, actually, that served in the PC caucus at that time, and quite frankly I'd love to hear them stand up and try to say in this House or outside of this House that that wasn't the case, that it wasn't meant to torpedo her bill.

Then I remember when Bill 10 was tabled. That was one of the later nights that we were in this House debating, Mr. Speaker. I remember that some of the government was starting to get swayed. There were cracks they didn't understand because of the push-back. The former Premier at the time was out of the province, and I remember that there was a crackdown.

11:20

Well, I'll never forget. The reason I remember this is that I stood up and I was speaking, and I said: wow, daddy has got a really long arm to swat down from outside of the province any type of resistance. He had heard that members were starting to grow concerned. In fact, the former Minister of Infrastructure, Sandra Jansen, was one of those that really disagreed with the government's approach and knew that it wasn't going to protect students the way that the government claimed. I mean, it was really a shell of, "It's going to protect students," but it actually didn't.

Mr. Speaker, we made history a couple of years ago when we passed protections and put them into law that students who want to start GSAs can't be blocked or sidelined or delayed or dragged out or, again, that teachers and principals can't out kids. If you ask me, that's their decision when they want to come out and express their identity, whether it's to their parents, to their friends, or to their family. No one has the right to force someone out. Personally, I think that's an attack on a person's human rights.

The other thing about this repeal. You know, the members opposite can talk about how this is the strongest protection in the country. I mean, that is the biggest load of baloney when you look at comparisons across the country, to what other jurisdictions do as far as protections. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think it's disingenuous and frustrating when one looks at the protections in place in other provinces. It's very easy to see that it falls far short. In fact, we currently are the strongest, under the legislation that the New Democrat government passed, and we're about to take about 20 steps backwards.

Now, the issues that I have around this are the students, first and foremost, and removing protections for them. We've heard over and over again that GSAs save lives, and we know that. That is a fact that no member can dispute. There, sadly, have been lots of young people who have taken their lives, whether it's because of bullying or pressure or stress. I mean, I can't even imagine some of the situations that young people have been put in because of who they are, which just seems ridiculous. We should truly, if we are an accepting and open society, do just that for every person regardless of the colour of their skin, their sexual orientation, who they love, what faith they practise. But we have a far way to go, Mr. Speaker. The protections we brought in were just that, to ensure that we are protecting our students and our young people.

I remember – and I know the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talked about this – that one of the amendments that the previous government under the PCs brought in was that they said, "Okay. You can have a GSA, just not on the school property; you can run over to Tim Hortons, you can go to 7-Eleven, or you can go somewhere else and have a club," which I thought was absolutely ridiculous.

The other piece of it, Mr. Speaker, is I think it's important to listen to the people of this province, especially the young people of this province, who said: "I don't understand why the government is so opposed to this. This is an after school club." I would love to know how many schools phoned parents to say: "Oh, my God. Johnny is taking chess. Did you know that Johnny has joined the chess club?" That seems absurd, absolutely absurd.

I mean, when I went to school, to my knowledge, teachers never called my parents to say what clubs or sports teams I joined.

**Ms Phillips:** They called them for other reasons.

**Mr. Bilous:** Well, that may be true. I might not have been the best model student back in high school, but that story is for maybe later

on in the Bill 8 debate – who knows? – when the hour gets really late.

The other thing I just wanted to touch on briefly, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that the bill as it sits also is going to put teachers and principals in a very, very awkward position. As a teacher I can tell you that I would not be comfortable phoning a parent and outing a student, yet I would be in contravention of this bill and could potentially lose my job. The conundrum or quagmire or position that this bill will put teachers and support staff in is completely unfair to them, wanting to ensure that students are protected and safe, yet they will be blatantly breaking the law.

The other thing that I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, my issue with this, is the complete and utter attack on a democratically elected trustee through this bill. It is offensive that a group of other trustees can essentially remove a trustee from their position. That is a complete attack on democracy. Trustees are duly elected, just like every single member in this House, and I think that members would have an issue if that was proposed for this place. Could you imagine? I mean, very quickly you would become an autocratic, one-party state. We don't want to encourage groupthink. We want to encourage trustees to be able to come up with innovative ideas, to propose and have healthy debates. What this is going to do is stifle that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much time I have, but in the essence of time, for those reasons, I would like to move an amendment, that I will read into the record.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, if you would just pass the amendment through to us. I can assure you that you have approximately five minutes left. If you can get that to us, get it to the table here, then we will proceed as such. If you can just hang on.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you don't mind, I'll read this into *Hansard* right now while the table is receiving it.

**The Speaker:** Just one second. Hang on.

Excellent. Thank you, hon. member. This will be referred to as RA1.

**Mr. Bilous:** Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm moving this amendment on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview that the motion for second reading of Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that further time is necessary to enable school boards to adjust their policies to comply with the proposed legislation and regulations.

Mr. Speaker, this is, I think, the most gentle way of giving time for this bill, that is completely flawed, to be reviewed and amended at the appropriate place and time, to which, I can tell you, I will have much more to say. As we all know in this House, I am not a member who's known for his brevity.

With that, Mr. Speaker, for the time being I will move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader is rising.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've had a great evening, lots of progress, and as such, I would move to adjourn the House until tomorrow at 9 o'clock a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:29 p.m.]



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