



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, June 9, 2020

Day 28

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 30th Legislature**

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker  
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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)  
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Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)  
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
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Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)  
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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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Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

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Glasgo  
Jones  
Loyola  
Nielsen  
Singh

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Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

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Barnes  
Bilous  
Dang  
Horner  
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Reid  
Stephan  
Toor

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

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Neudorf  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
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### **Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

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Horner  
Irwin  
Neudorf  
Nielsen  
Nixon, Jeremy  
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Sigurdson, L.  
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### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

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Carson  
Deol  
Ganley  
Issik  
Jones  
Lovely  
Loyola  
Rehn  
Reid  
Renaud  
Turton  
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### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Rosin  
Sabir  
Singh  
Smith  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Ministerial Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Health.

#### COVID-19 and Economic Relaunch Stage 2

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All over the world people have expressed their thanks to everyone who has helped keep us safe throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Today as we announce stage 2 of our relaunch, I want to add my thanks on behalf of our government to all the doctors, the nurses, first responders, and others who are protecting us and caring for us through the pandemic.

I feel for the families who have lost loved ones. The pandemic has taken a tragic toll, especially on the elderly, and protecting them is the top priority for our relaunch strategy. But overall we've come through the pandemic much better than most other jurisdictions so far for two simple reasons. The first is because Albertans are following the advice of the chief medical officer of health. They're doing the right thing and for the right reason, Mr. Speaker, not out of fear of punishment but because they see for themselves that it makes sense and it follows the evidence.

The other reason we've done so well is that our health system and first responders have done their job so well, the whole system, from Dr. Hinshaw and the staff at Alberta Health and AHS to the front-line staff and physicians and community first responders.

COVID-19 is a reminder of why I'm so proud of this health system. We've led Canada and the world in so many ways that it's hard to keep track: testing; contact tracing; online self-assessment; modelling and capacity planning; procurement of PPE, ventilators, and other resources; real-time online case data; the ABTraceTogether app; the staged relaunch plan and guidance on reopening for businesses and others; research, including the new biorepository; partnerships, from the BIRDY or event project to distributing masks at drive-through restaurants; and now an orderly restart of scheduled surgery and other care.

Most of all, the strength of this health system has been the same as it ever was, the skill and dedication of our staff and physicians. To take just one key example, our hospitals are among the safest anywhere because of effective infection control. To date just 32 staff are believed to have acquired COVID at work and no physicians at all. That's not luck; it's good practice. And it doesn't just protect the staff and physicians; it protects patients, Mr. Speaker. It's a key condition for restarting scheduled surgery and for our relaunch overall.

So to everyone in the health system and our community partners: on behalf of our government, thank you. We're in good hands, and

we know you'll do everything possible to continue to keep us safe as we relaunch our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the statement from the Minister of Health. Of course, once again we were not advised that this statement was going to be made, but that is the choice of the government if they do not want to follow that convention of the House.

But I would echo the statements of the Minister of Health. Indeed, we recognize the incredible work that our front-line health care workers have done throughout this global pandemic. They have truly been the heroes, from our family doctors to our doctors in hospital to our nurses to our paramedics to the front-line health care aides, who have looked after seniors even under the most difficult conditions and often lacking the support that should have been there for them. They have stepped up, and they have supported. Indeed, I echo what the minister had to say about Albertans choosing to follow the recommendations of our chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, herself a public health care hero not only in the province of Alberta but recognized and respected across Canada for her guidance and her leadership. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is because of their work that Albertans have come through this as well as they have.

The Minister of Health praised our public health system for its capacity and its work, yet this is a government that continually stands in this House and in the community and says that this very health care system is one where we pay too much and get too little. We have seen, Mr. Speaker, the value of a public health care system that has received the investment it needed. We were proud as a government, over the four years that we were in, to continue to fund for inflation and population growth, to stabilize what had been years of roller-coaster funding under Conservative governments, that had left that system often in chaos and uncertainty. But the stability that was provided and indeed the hard work and dedication of all of our public health care workers, even when they themselves felt under attack and disrespected by their government – they still stood and looked out for Albertans and their communities. I salute them.

We will continue, in the Official Opposition, to support good initiatives to protect the health of Albertans. We will also continue to stand to offer criticism and suggestions of better ways to ensure that this incredible public health care system, which brought us through this global pandemic, our public laboratory system, which sadly may be up for auction soon, all of the aspects are able to continue and provide Albertans with the service and support they deserve.

Thank you.

### Members' Statements

#### Federal-provincial Relations

**Ms Phillips:** No doubt the right-wing Wexiteer flank of the UCP caucus looks restive these days. It must annoy them that the Fair Deal Panel is delayed, which has been ready for weeks, according to one panelist. And, of course, the constant reliance on Ottawa for everything from assistance to the oil and gas sector to support for small business also annoys, I'm sure. The Premier has been giving the right flank a bit of latitude in the hopes they don't wander off and start their own party. And so it was, Mr. Speaker, to the cheers of his colleagues, that a UCP MLA rose yesterday to describe fellow Canadians as "hostile, parasitic partners" who are trying to "strangle and suffocate" Albertans. Interesting turn.

The Premier clearly needs to allow a pressure valve for his Wexiteer MLAs, but this same Premier uses “Justin will take care of it” to respond to every query by Alberta small business, families, and those who have lost jobs. Instead of helping Albertans, UCP government policy is to actually reach more into our pockets. They’ve raised our income tax, car insurance, property taxes, school fees, and as if that wasn’t enough pocket picking for one fiscal year, they turned around to our federal taxes and dove into the first available loophole to get Justin Trudeau to pay for their party’s operations. They’ve got their hands in every taxpayer’s pocket they could find, including our fellow Canadians’.

So the Premier is trying to appease his separatist-curious MLAs by allowing them to say impolitic things about our fellow Canadians, but the real agenda? Take Ottawa’s money. It’s almost as if this Premier has more faith in Ottawa than he does in Albertans. But here’s the thing: if you’re going to insist that you don’t need to lift a finger to help Albertans because the feds are there to do it for you, you don’t also get to take other Canadians’ money and insult them while you do it.

To help with all this, the UCP could just repay the money they took from federal taxpayers. That might actually help to appease Albertans, who are increasingly annoyed at all these UCP hands in all of our pockets.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

### Environmental Monitoring and Reporting

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks back the NDP was all wild-eyed and scared to come back to work, as you may recall. Well, they’re feeling better now because they’re back on that fear and smear campaign. The members opposite continue to misrepresent the facts to Albertans despite being repeatedly corrected in this House. The most recent target: the Alberta Energy Regulator’s decision to defer some environmental reporting. Members opposite, including the NDP leader, continue to state in this House, in public that there is no environmental monitoring taking place across the oil and gas sector. These statements are completely false and absolutely, utterly ridiculous.

The AER, an independent, arm’s-length regulatory body, established two guiding principles to balance worker safety, public health guidelines, and environmental stewardship during COVID-19. Firstly, exemptions would be low risk for potential short-term impacts. Secondly, it must be noted that public health orders pose a challenge to completing normal monitoring activity. Companies continue to regularly monitor surface water and groundwater quality. All emission controls and regular monitoring programs remain in place. All wildlife deterrence mitigations remain in place.

1:40

Again, Mr. Speaker, in this very House, in telling community – members opposite are telling people that there are no wildlife protections in place even though they know this is a complete fabrication. It’s clear that the NDP has taken a page right out of the socialist playbook: if you repeat it enough times, it’ll make it true. Furthermore, repeatedly spreading misinformation and falsehoods on such scale damages Alberta’s reputation. Environmental and social governance is an important factor in the international investment community. Alberta is actually a leader in ESG. It is really a disservice to Albertans that the NDP spends so much of their time and energy to try to score cheap political points while chasing oil and gas investment out of this province.

Maybe the NDP is still mad about their social licence, or maybe – just maybe – this ongoing campaign to degrade Canada’s energy

industry is simply an obligation to the Leap Manifesto. Perhaps if they watched *Planet of the Humans*, they’d have their eyes opened. To the NDP: how about working with us to get the economy going again, and stop your childish games?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Member for Peace River has a statement.

### Skills for Jobs Provincial Agenda

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m honoured to rise today to speak to an important issue to the constituents in my riding of Peace River: the success of the government’s skill-for-jobs agenda, which is a robust plan to get Albertans back to work and grow our economy. Alberta faces the dual challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic collapsing demand in oil and a predatory price war in global oil markets at the same time. Both have wreaked havoc on our economy, and Albertans are suffering because of it. That’s why this government has committed to creating opportunities for young Albertans to learn practical job skills that meet the demands of our labour market today and will help them succeed and build prosperity for all Albertans tomorrow.

As part of that commitment, Mr. Speaker, our minister has been busy. He’s created a \$1.5 million Alberta high school apprenticeship scholarship focusing on trades and our youth and in our schools, invested \$10 million over four years in Women Building Futures to support women who want to pursue opportunities in the skilled trades. He’s added even more funding to the Skills Canada Alberta and Careers: the Next Generation programs, and in 2023 this government will commit \$6 million a year to that program. Our government is taking real, concrete action to help Albertans get jobs and move forward in life.

Mr. Speaker, we have also established the Skills for Jobs Task Force to strengthen and expand apprenticeship education in Alberta. Our government firmly believes that apprenticeship learning and skilled trades have every bit as much value, worth, and merit as a university education. The Minister of Advanced Education is still committed to the new performance-based funding model next year. Although delayed, this is an important part of having sustainable education in the future.

My priority, Mr. Speaker, for my part, is to train Albertans in my own riding for jobs that not only align with what the market is asking for but also provide fulfilling, long-term, meaningful employment for families. Alberta needs working Albertans. That’s why the Alberta government has a credible plan to get Albertans back to work.

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

### Racism Prevention

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Black Lives Matter protests following the death of George Floyd have reached every corner of the world. People and institutions are vocalizing their supports for the movement and against systemic racism in our society.

Yesterday I asked the government why their statement on this very issue didn’t denounce racism specifically against the black community and why the Anti-Racism Advisory Council’s full statement was silenced. I also asked how the government was planning to learn from the movement and about their plans to engage with the antiracism council and their support for antiracism initiatives. These questions are top of mind for many Albertans, including in my riding, and they’re important questions because since taking office, this government has cut funding for antiracism grants, the community initiative program, and for the decades-old

Alberta human rights education and multiculturalism fund, that supported the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee since 2002. However, we didn't get any answers.

Also, yesterday it was reported in CityNews that the Premier was asked by a journalist, and I quote: what are your thoughts on these Black Lives Matter demonstrations; in moving ahead, what role will the province play in addressing systemic racism in Alberta? Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the Premier was not able to point to a single step or action his government is taking or intends to take to address systemic racism. Instead, the Premier went on lecturing about how to protest.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that addressing racism is a partisan issue which requires us to take a stance and tell Albertans where we stand. I know that on this side of the House we stand firmly against systemic racism and have committed to listening to black communities and marginalized communities to address this issue. I suggest that government do the same because, as Dr. King said, there comes a time when silence is betrayal.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

### COVID-19 Response and Economic Relaunch Strategy

**Ms Rosin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's now been 90 days since the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic. Since that day we've seen an unparalleled shift in our ways of being. Our identities, which were so entrenched in our jobs, our friends, and our extracurriculars, were stalled. Our province was quick to act, to do what we believed needed to be done to protect the health and financial security of those living in our province. Alberta, Canada, and the entire world were forced to stand still.

When we as a province presented our modelling on April 8, it showed a terrifying potential spread of this virus. Evidence gathered from other outbreaks informed that modelling, and the scenarios helped us prepare for the potential impact of a pandemic and its peak. Our probable scenario was comparable to other countries. Our modelling showed 800,000 infected, from 400 to 3,100 deaths. What we actually saw was only 7,000 cases, 6,700 of which fully recovered. We were prepared for the worst. We had respirators and the PPE, and we were ready to shelter in the storm together. But now that the worst is definitely behind us, we see that the modelling that was presented to us months ago remains well below even our lowest projected numbers. Albertans stood up, and we flattened the curve.

But there will be unintended consequences of this pandemic in the future. We're starting to see them already. Alberta small businesses have been hit hard. However, without reopening industry, things are not going to get better any time soon. So now it's time that Albertans return to a province of freedom and self-determination, one with grassroots thought and decision-making. That is why we are accelerating the phase to relaunch and why we are opening faster and earlier than originally thought. This will help us build back our province together.

Albertans have already shown that we are the best under pressure, and we are strong when we stand together. Mr. Speaker, flattening the COVID-19 curve was only our beginning.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has a statement to make.

### Calgary LRT Green Line

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few years ago the future of the green line looked bright. All three levels of government were

committed, and then the UCP backed out. Since then Calgary has gone through a municipal election where the green line became a central issue, and in that election Calgarians resoundingly chose to build the green line. But there are some who are unwilling to accept the democratic will of the people. This includes a group of wealthy UCP insiders that has given tens of thousands of dollars to the UCP directly and to the Premier, and it also includes the UCP's own commissioner looking into the funding of environmental organizations.

Last June this group of UCP insiders started a campaign to kill the green line, and less than a month later the Premier suddenly had a change of heart. Suddenly he was okay with stopping the green line. And in last October's budget the Premier drastically cut funding but assured everyone it was coming later. Just trust him.

Since then the campaign to kill the green line has only intensified. The UCP-aligned group has launched a full-blown campaign to stop the project. Meanwhile the Premier and his government have been silent.

When the green line was first announced, it was said, quote: it's difficult for municipalities alone to finance this kind of expensive, modern, cutting-edge infrastructure; together with our municipal and provincial partners we will ensure Calgary has the rapid transit infrastructure to make this dynamic city move into the future. That was the then federal minister, now the UCP Premier, in 2015. I wish the Premier would listen to his old self and stand up for this project, that will build a modern economy and create 20,000 jobs for Calgarians.

### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call.

### Rural Health Care

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care in rural Alberta is in danger. Doctors are leaving, clinics are closing, and families are worried. What is the Premier's office telling rural Alberta families, like the ones in Crossfield, who are losing their family doctor? "Suck it up. Drive to the city." What this Premier doesn't get is that when they leave the town for services, they are also going to leave the town to do their shopping. Families will take money out of their community, and that is what destroys rural Alberta. Why is the Premier telling Albertans to give up on having a family doctor in town and thus give up on their community?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that Alberta has the highest per capita number of physicians in Canada, by a country mile. We have the best compensated physicians in Canada. We have the most generous incentives for physicians to locate in rural communities in Canada. The number of physicians serving in Alberta has grown over the past year, and the minister recently announced an additional package of incentives to encourage physicians to stay and locate in rural Alberta.

1:50

**Mr. Shepherd:** Yet despite those incentives, Mr. Speaker, they continue to leave.

"For those of us from Airdrie, the worry and fear is that we will not make it in time: will the baby be born on the Deerfoot on our 45-minute commute, or will my child die?" That's the Member for Airdrie-East, which is closer to Calgary than Crossfield. Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of communities closer to Calgary than Crossfield. There are lots of communities within 50 kilometres of Edmonton, Red Deer, and Lethbridge. Why does the Premier think

that it's acceptable to tell rural Albertans to drive farther, wait longer, and risk more to access health care services?

**Mr. Kenney:** I reject the inaccurate preamble to the question, Mr. Speaker. I would remind the member opposite that under the last year of the NDP government 27 rural doctors left their service in rural Alberta, that since then the government of Alberta has added a package with a monetary value of some \$80 million to incentivize rural physicians. That is for about 800 rural physicians; that averages about \$100,000 per physician. While the NDP allowed costs to go uncontrolled, we are ensuring that we can manage costs while incentivizing additional service in rural Alberta.

**Mr. Shepherd:** It's doctors, Mr. Speaker, that said that their gift is akin to a bank robber giving a little bit back and calling it a charitable donation.

When I was in grade 3, our family doctor left. This created some struggle, and it took us nearly five years . . . before we could find another family doctor. We celebrated when we got that new . . . doctor. [But] they left two years later. By the time I was in about grade 9, I gave up on the idea of having a family doctor.

That's the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, a community also losing doctors. Why is this Premier telling his own rural MLAs who have lived through this very experience and spoken about it in this House to tell their constituents that they should also have to give up on having a doctor?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is talking about bank robbery for a category of people who on average bill approximately \$400,000 per year in Alberta, in this province, 20 per cent more than the average across the country. Happily, they also enjoy the lowest income taxes and a much lower cost of living than in comparable major provinces like Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia.

Mr. Speaker, doctors: there's always a shift in terms of the number serving. Net overall, the province gained 293 physicians in the last fiscal year, to March 31.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is rising with a question.

#### Support for Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19

**Member Ceci:** Thank you. This government has failed to properly support small businesses during phase 1 and now phase 2 of the COVID-19 relaunch. In fact, only 50 per cent of Calgary businesses that have reopened are fully operating. And this UCP government has offered only deferred bills and small grants that don't measure up. The owner of Calgary's Niko's Bistro said yesterday, quote: when it comes to September and October, I'm scared. To the Premier. Approximately 40 per cent of businesses are telling you that they might not survive, and they're telling you that they're scared. Please tell us what else you're going to do to keep our small businesses running.

**Mr. Kenney:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I can totally understand the anxiety of small businesses given that we are, as a result of this global pandemic and a collapse in our largest industry, facing the most challenging year in our economy since the 1930s. That is why our government has responded with unprecedented ambition, committing \$14.6 billion to date in cash support, in deferrals, and in liquidity measures to support families and Alberta job creators, including the \$200 million relaunch grants to small businesses announced last Friday.

**Member Ceci:** Ambition doesn't pay the bills for small businesses. It took this Premier 57 days from our caucus calling for more small-business supports for him to do the bare minimum. Businesses are speaking out and telling this government that covering the costs of hiring staff and buying PPEs are not sustainable, but this government is still failing to listen and respond. But while the government leaves Calgary businesses hanging, they had zero problem leaping through the nearest loophole to subsidize their party fundraisers. Does this Premier even care that businesses are telling him that they need support, or now that his party staff have their money, has he pulled out his earplugs or left them in?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, while the NDP offers nothing but insults, this government is offering concrete support to protect Alberta families and job creators during this unprecedented time of trial. I would remind the member opposite that when he was the worst Finance minister in our province's history, he imposed a carbon tax that he hid from Albertans in the previous election, that cost the average small business \$4,000 a year. We scrapped that tax. He imposed a 50 per cent increase in the minimum wage for small and medium-sized businesses during a recession, which continues to be the single-largest complaint of small-business people in terms of struggling in today's economy.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We reduced the small-business tax to 2 per cent with that carbon tax, and he actually put earplugs in.

For weeks our NDP opposition has been calling on this government to ban commercial evictions during COVID-19. Alberta's small businesses are reporting that they're only earning 15 per cent of the revenue that they were in March. Now some fear they're going to be evicted altogether. The Premier hints at legislation but wavers when asked about implementing a full commercial evictions ban. To the Premier: why is it always half measures with you? The businesses in Calgary, the businesses right across this province need your full support right now.

**Mr. Kenney:** Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing is for certain. It was never half measures when he was Finance minister. It was a full on attack on businesses, on employers, and on the Alberta economy: higher business taxes, the carbon tax, higher income taxes, higher property taxes, higher red tape, higher labour costs, higher everything, which led to the jobs crisis that this government had to inherit.

In terms of rent protection or eviction protection, we'll be bringing forward legislation in that regard. On the first day that the federal government announced the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program, this government committed the full \$67 million to it. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

#### Education-sector Layoffs MLAs' Participation in Graduation Ceremonies

**Ms Hoffman:** On Saturday Casey and Tom Jay wrote to the Premier and said:

It's not been easy, especially for Tom. He is autistic and legally blind. He misses his teachers, friends, and teacher's aide a lot! Since you guys cut funding to his educational assistant, I've been filling in [the role] as his aide while working on completing my high school classes and while working as a part time cleaner.



The Premier has harmed this family with his cuts. Will he do them the courtesy of writing them back personally, and what will he say?

**Mr. Kenney:** Well, the first thing I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that Albertans support children with special needs. I would secondly say that they should not listen to the disinformation of the NDP because, in point of fact, funding for education has increased under this government. You only need to look at page 122 of the budget to see the highest level of spending in Alberta history, the highest per capita spending in the country. In terms of special needs, unfortunately, schools were suspended on March 17 because of the pandemic, so the normal access to special-needs teachers was no longer available. But, happily, the schools will be opening in the fall.

**Ms Hoffman:** Casey, who identifies as a Calgary high school student, goes on to say:

Tom and I told our parents, teachers, and school principal [that] we don't want anyone who has hurt us this year including all [the] UCP MLAs, [the minister and the Premier] at our graduation.

This family didn't get a choice about the UCP taking their tax dollars to pay their partisan political staff, but, Premier, Tom and Casey should get a say in who attends his graduation this year. Will you apologize for your minister's letter and retract her threats?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, you know, one thing I can observe is that in this time of extraordinary trial Albertans have pulled together with one notable exception. This party opposite has been criticized by commentators, objective commentators, nationally for being the most divisive in the midst of this crisis. Case in point: the minister simply said to school boards that aldermen, mayors, Members of Parliament, members of the Legislature are always welcome at public school graduation ceremonies. They're not required to be there, but it's part of our democracy. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The letter from these students to the Premier ends with this quote.

We don't feel safe with your presence at all. Please don't come.

Premier, you and your minister have done real harm to this family, and they are telling you this directly. Why are you trying to force your way into Tom's celebration instead of respecting the wishes of this student who has special needs?

2:00

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, I'm doing no such thing, and the nature and tone of that question speaks for itself. The nature of that member, who once referred to Albertans as being sewer rats: that is a member who brings into this place a habit of division, derision, and defamation. She should be ashamed of herself. She should apologize for her conduct in Alberta politics.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has the call.

### COVID-19 and Care Facilities

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were horrified by the loss of life at McKenzie Towne continuing care centre in Calgary. Now another major tragedy is unfolding at Extencicare Hillcrest, also in Calgary, where 20 seniors have died from COVID-19. That's even more than the 19 that died at McKenzie Towne. The families of these Albertans deserve answers about what went wrong and why. Premier, have you been briefed about the outbreak at

Extencicare Hillcrest, and can you tell this House why so many lives have been lost?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My heart goes out to all Albertans who have lost a loved one during this pandemic. I would say this. Before the pandemic we were doing a review of continuing care legislation, all six acts and six regs and three different standards of care, and we now want to use this as an opportunity for us to also review the response to the pandemic and what we can do to continue further not just legislatively but also how the system can be designed to take care and to take better precaution for the most vulnerable. I'm looking forward to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek chairing that review and coming back to us with recommendations.

**Ms Sigurdson:** All of the deadliest outbreaks in Alberta have been in privately operated continuing care facilities. This government was slow to respond with sufficient PPE or a plan to implement single-site staffing. In fact, the government admitted that some seniors in Alberta are still being cared for by workers who are moving from site to site to site, almost two months after the rule was supposed to be in place. Premier, will you personally guarantee to all Alberta seniors that they will have the single-site staffing protection you promised them by the end of the week?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, I find it disappointing, because this question has been asked before, that the members of the opposition, including the hon. member who's asking the question, continue to attack the orders of the chief medical officer of health and, in particular, the four sites out of our 400. We have 400 sites throughout the province, and there are four sites which were provided an exemption by the chief medical officer of health. Instead of giving deference to the professional and medical advice of Dr. Hinshaw, we continue to see it being attacked, and I find that incredibly disappointing.

**Ms Sigurdson:** A growing number of Alberta families are heading to court to find justice for their loved ones. They know that the system failed. But not everyone has the time or money to pursue a protracted legal battle with large corporations who make hundreds of millions of dollars in annual profit. All Albertans deserve to know the truth and to know that the province has acted to ensure that these outbreaks will be prevented in the event of future waves of COVID or another virus. Premier, will you give these Albertans the public inquiry they're asking for?

**Mr. Shandro:** Mr. Speaker, I think I've said this before. I know the hon. member sticks to her notes, but the question was answered in my first answer. We are using our review of the continuing care system and the legislation to be able to review the system as a whole and learn how the system can be designed to take care of our vulnerable. As I said, my heart goes out to all Albertans who've lost a loved one, in particular those who have been lost who've been residents in our continuing care facilities. But it's important for us to remember the context. Both Ontario and Quebec have lost . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Member for Lethbridge-East is rising with a question.

### Economic Relaunch Stage 2

**Mr. Neudorf:** Mr. Speaker, it's been obvious to all observers that the COVID-19 infection curve has flattened, and our health care

system is not overwhelmed. That's why I was pleased to see that we are accelerating our relaunch and that stage 2 businesses can begin to open as soon as this coming Friday, June 12. It's obvious that the government put a lot of forethought into this decision. Can the Premier tell the House what led to the decision to move to stage 2?

**Mr. Kenney:** I thank the member for the thoughtful question, Mr. Speaker. Fortunately, thanks to the tremendous resilience and responsibility of ordinary Albertans across the province we have flattened the curve. We have exceeded our expectations in every respect in the fight against COVID-19. We have only 355 active cases and 44 people with COVID in hospitals across Alberta. This is a decrease of almost 70 per cent in active cases since May 14, when we started phase 1 of the relaunch. We've met all of the criteria to move forward, advancing phase 2 to June 12 and advancing many items from phase 3 into phase 2.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier. Stage 2 has led to more industries and more businesses opening, and some businesses that were already opening are seeing their restrictions loosened. The announcement this morning also included some businesses that were originally scheduled to open in stage 3 such as gyms. Can the Premier tell this House whether consultation was done with these organizations and whether they will be ready for stage 2?

**Mr. Kenney:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can't guarantee that a hundred per cent of the individual businesses will be ready. But with respect to gyms and many other sectors I want to thank them, first of all, for their remarkable patience, the sacrifices they have made and, secondly, for having brought forward very specific and constructive guidelines to Alberta Health on how they could operate safely. Not only will gyms be open in phase 2, but libraries, more surgeries in the health system, wellness services like massage, acupuncture, reflexology, personal services, indoor recreation, theatres, community halls, team sports, pools for leisure, et cetera.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the Premier. It's obvious to all members of this House that Albertans want the economy to reopen and that their hard work has led to our province being able to open faster and earlier, but we all know that the fight against COVID-19 is far from over. Can the Premier tell the House what precautions our government is taking to limit infections and whether Albertans need to continue to take precautions to limit the spread?

**Mr. Kenney:** Albertans do have to continue to act responsibly, follow the public health guidelines. Mr. Speaker, we don't want people wrongly getting the impression that this is all over and that we're fully back to normal. I wish that were the case, but it cannot be at this stage. So there are still limits, for example, on social gatherings of 50 people indoors because those have proven to be very high vectors for transmission. There are limits to outdoor gatherings of a hundred. We ask people to look online but, most importantly, to follow the basic hygiene protocols: frequent washing of hands and physical distancing wherever possible.

### Economic Recovery and Women

**Member Irwin:** Evidence is clear that women are bearing the brunt of the pandemic. Last month across the country women only

regained 30 per cent of the jobs that were created even though they make up 50 per cent of our population. To add to this, the UCP government's attacks on the public sector also disproportionately hurt women. To the Premier: what are you doing to ensure that your panel, your mostly male panel, has a plan for an economic recovery that centres on the needs of women?

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you very much for the question. I think it was a question. I would like to very much thank the panel that is working on economic recovery. I'm fairly certain that I can without any bias suggest that the folks that are on that panel, which is made up of men and women, are very focused on the well-being and the economic ability of all people in this province right across. The wonderful thing about having a group like that is that it's one piece of the puzzle. They don't work by themselves. They work with absolutely every organization.

**Member Irwin:** Given that thus far this government has not allocated a sufficient amount of money towards ensuring that child care operators will be able to get through this pandemic and economists of all stripes argue that child care is an essential pillar of any successful economic recovery, to the Minister of Children's Services: what are you doing to ensure that affordable, accessible, quality child care is a key part of your government's plan for economic recovery? Please be specific.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing to address those needs is listening to parents and child care operators across this province. We've hosted six tele town halls with child care centre operators and preschools right across this province to hear what their needs were. They had asked for around \$18 million to be redirected to support them through the pandemic so that they're able to open up and support families as parents get back to work. That's exactly what we've done.

**Member Irwin:** Given that the Alberta sexual violence hotline saw a 57 per cent rise in the number of calls during the first month of the pandemic and experts and front-line workers are expecting this number to continue to rise in the coming months as the economy opens up, to the minister responsible for the status of women. Before the pandemic Alberta already had the third-highest rate of domestic violence in the country. What are you doing to address this increase in domestic and sexual violence?

2:10

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you very much, and thank you for the important question. We've actually had the privilege of meeting with many of the associations, especially during COVID. One of the things that we realized is that all of us needed to stay home and stay safe, but we realized very quickly that home was not necessarily safe for people who are suffering from domestic violence and sexual assault. This is why we actually saw an increase in the numbers going to the One Line. As a result of that and discussions, actually, with the federal minister, we're looking at potentially even expanding that line nationally as a result of the good work that is being done by our associations.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

### Opioid Overdoses

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In May of last year Edmonton EMS responded to 108 opiate emergencies while this May EMS responded to 246 cases, more than double. One day alone last month saw 16 emergency calls. EMS public education officer Alex Campbell said, and I quote: we only see the worst of the worst calls, and we know that there's been a large number of activations of the community-based naloxone kits. What is the associate minister of mental health doing right now to address this concerning and tragic growth in opiate overdose, and why is it taking so long to respond?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I met with officials from George Spady Centre and Boyle Street in Edmonton. We spoke to the front-line people who are working with this, and my heart goes out to them for all of their hard work and also to the first responders responding to the COVID-19 requests. Our government responded with the most comprehensive response, a \$53 million comprehensive package made available to Albertans 24/7. No matter where they are, they can access services.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in April there were 676 reported overdose reversals through the community-based naloxone program, the highest number in more than a year, and given that Marliss Taylor, the director of Streetworks, said, and I quote, "I've been a nurse in the inner city for 25 years, and I've never seen anything like this ever," and given that the only response from the associate minister so far has been to note that the first opiate surveillance report is expected to be released next week, can the associate minister of mental health explain why he's waiting for a report when lives are on the line?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to understand that consuming illicit drugs is very dangerous, and that's why our government made a lot of support services available to help people get out of addiction. I'm proud to share with our House that we tracked five quarters of the fatality report on the opioid crisis. We are cautiously optimistic that the number has been steadily going down, but with COVID-19 we anticipate that there will be some increase coming.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that you anticipated that it would go up with COVID, I would hope that there would have been a strategy. Given that this minister and the government have a troubling history of attacking harm reduction and given the doubling of emergency opiate cases since last year and given again that Marliss Taylor from Streetworks noted that the last two weeks were notably bad for overdoses and given that Taylor, who was, again, a nurse for 25 years, quoted that it just feels really deadly out there for people and given that despite these increases there's been no action from the minister, why won't the minister act? Is he waiting for them to triple, to quadruple? What's going on?

**Mr. Luan:** Speaking of a track record, this previous government failed Albertans with a one-pillar approach that did not help any

Albertans get out of addiction. Managing an ever-increasing population won't make – we have no hesitation in telling Albertans that our government will be laser focused on helping people get out of addiction. We have a recovery-oriented continuum of care. We're proud to lead the nation on this. In the coming weeks and months we'll be happy to report more to the House on our progress.

### Economic Relaunch and Recovery

**Ms Rosin:** Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has uprooted our province, our economy, and all sense of normalcy, but it's time to face the facts. The COVID-19 curve in Alberta has been flattened. In fact, the modelling presented to us months ago never even reached the best-case-scenario numbers, never mind the worst. So after months of economic hardship, lingering fear, and rates of unemployment that should terrify us, the people of our province need a morale boost, and I believe it's time we allowed more businesses, including the many who were forced to stay closed during phase 1, to properly reopen. To the Premier: with only .01 per cent of our province actively ill, isn't it time to accelerate phase 2?

**Mr. Kenney:** Yes, it is, Mr. Speaker. That was the announcement that I made with the Minister of Health and Dr. Hinshaw earlier today, that we are moving forward earlier than expected with the phase 2 relaunch and more broadly than planned. It will begin this Friday, June 12. Earlier we indicated it would be no earlier than June 19. Those numbers the member cited didn't happen by accident, and they didn't happen by massive overintervention. This province took a lighter hand in terms of public health restrictions than almost anywhere in the developed world with better results. Kudos to Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

**Ms Rosin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier. That's great news. We have also received an outpouring of cries for help from small businesses who are unable to make ends meet with their doors forced shut while their rent payments, bills, and inventory costs pile up. But given that the best support we can give small businesses right now is an endorsement to reopen and resume operations without governmental overreach and regulation but, rather, effective guidelines and supports, to the Premier: what all businesses can we now expect to see open with phase 2?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Mr. Kenney:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On the first point, on Friday I joined the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism to announce our \$200 million commitment to the small-business relaunch grants, the details of which will be forthcoming, as well as legislation for some form of commercial rent protection in addition to the \$14.6 billion of fiscal action taken by this government to offer liquidity and cash and other forms of support. As I mentioned, there's a long list of additional businesses. We ask people that will be able to operate as of June 12 to go to the Alberta Biz Connect website to see that as well as the guidelines for safe operation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Rosin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again, Premier. Well, given that many people I talked to and, truthfully, myself included don't want to return to a new normal but obviously want to return to the old normal, where we live with resilience and without fear, where we exercise self-responsibility rather than

relying on government to guide our every action, the economic repercussions of COVID-19 will be long lasting in Alberta, as will the financial repercussions. So lest financial economic ruin be the legacy of our generation, when can we now expect to hear more about the findings and recommendations of our government's appointed economic recovery panel?

**Mr. Kenney:** The member raises an absolutely critical question. As I've said from day one, this challenge is not just to save lives but also livelihoods in the face of the largest economic contraction in eight decades, Mr. Speaker. With the double whammy of the collapse of energy prices in Alberta, the government, including the Minister of Finance, will be coming forward with Alberta's economic recovery strategy. But today's announcement is an important step in that direction. We will build on the profound advantages we have as a province – our fiscal advantage, the advantage of our young population, our diverse population – in that strategy.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

#### Public Service Pension Fund Administration

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers, custodians, municipal construction workers are just a few of the workers who are going to have their pensions managed exclusively by AIMCo because of the decisions of this government. Yesterday the Minister of Finance told this House that AIMCo provided, and I quote, excellent returns. He boasted that AIMCo beat the benchmark eight out of the 10 past years, but he's picking the wrong measure. Among active public investment managers AIMCo is one of the worst performers. To this minister: do you still stand behind the comments you've made repeatedly in this House?

**Mr. Kenney:** Well, the minister is absolutely right in the historic performance of AIMCo, Mr. Speaker. However, the member in her questions betrays the economic illiteracy of the NDP. They love to scare folks in the public sector about the viability of their pensions, but let me say this very clearly to the member: these are government-guaranteed defined benefit pensions. The benefits are unrelated to the returns achieved by the investment management agency. I regret that the economic illiteracy of the NDP makes it impossible to grasp.

**Ms Gray:** Given that getting good returns is important for these pensions and given that the Institutional Investor, the leading publication in Wall Street, has yet another piece on AIMCo's volatility-based investment strategy that resulted in Albertans losing billions of dollars, given that they quoted a hedge fund manager saying that Canada is definitely known for having some of the most sophisticated players and that CPPIB is known for being one of the best – by being in Canada, AIMCo piggybacks on that reputation – why does the minister think he can gamble with these retirements?

2:20

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier just noted, the public-sector pensions in Alberta are government-backed, government-guaranteed pensions. These are pensions that have a defined benefit. The benefit will be there for public-sector workers in the future, guaranteed. We continue to believe and have

confidence in AIMCo's ability to deliver high-quality returns for pension holders in the future.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans are appalled that this minister hijacked their pensions – no discussion, no consent – and given that the reason for forcing Alberta pensions to AIMCo is their purported excellent returns and given that we now know the minister was cherry-picking the data and that AIMCo is amongst the worst performers relative to its peers, will he agree with the millions of Albertans who have complained about the hijacking of their retirements that this issue deserves a real debate in this place about these pension changes?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to remind the members opposite that the motivation to consolidate pension management functions at AIMCo is to benefit from economies of scale. There's an abundant amount of research out there that shows that the larger the funds managed, the lower the cost to manage those funds. In the long term the changes we made to public-sector pensions will serve Alberta public-sector workers well and Alberta taxpayers well.

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

#### Child Care

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday this government announced that they would be launching invite-only consultations for the child care sector after scrapping the accreditation process abruptly in March. At a time when the sector has been asking for substantial financial supports to prevent them from collapsing – and parents don't know if there will be affordable child care for them when they need it – all this government has to offer is an online survey about red tape reduction. To the minister: do you commit to releasing a written report with raw data from these consultations, or are you going to continue to be the most secretive government in Canada?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. Under the former government's pilot project \$45 million in funding went to support 2 per cent of children age zero to six and 4 per cent of centres. That is unacceptable, and COVID made that inequity worse. We are offering a survey to every single parent, child care worker, and child care centre operator as well as the preschool operators across the province to take part in online surveys as well as the in-person consultations that are being led by my MLA colleague from Grande Prairie, and we are happy to hear the feedback from Albertans on this front.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud with no preamble, please.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that all Albertans would like to hear the results of those consultations and given that only 30 per cent of centres have reopened and many don't even know if they can reopen or if they will survive three months waiting for more financial supports from this government and given that to move ahead with economic recovery for all Albertans, particularly women, the government will need to ensure the availability of accessible and affordable child care, to the minister:

do you have a long-term strategic plan for child care in Alberta? If so, what is it?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, we are absolutely committed to an equitable approach to safe, high-quality, accessible, and affordable child care for those who need it in Alberta. But let me be clear that what we won't do is listen to the members opposite. They had grand plans to fund a billion-dollar child care program and no way to fund it. They forget that they were in government. They have a record of racking up debt, picking winners and losers, supporting 2 per cent of parents, 4 per cent of centres, ignoring small business and preschools altogether. That we won't do.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the question was, "What the minister's plan is" – and it's clear that she does not have one – given that what child care operators have been asking for in the six town halls with the minister is adequate and substantial financial support, and what they've received so far, \$11 million, not \$17 million, is only a Band-Aid on a crisis and given that the minister has the money in her budget and is also receiving federal income supports for child care and given that every reputable economist in this country is calling for child care to be a key component of economic recovery, will the minister commit to immediate and real support to the sector? Now, Minister, not after the system collapses.

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree with the member opposite that child care is hugely important to getting Alberta parents back to work. We are doing what we were asked for. Alberta child care and preschool operators in those town halls asked us to reinvest \$18 million in funding, and we're doing that. They asked us to move forward with this consultation. I know the member opposite doesn't appreciate that, but it's because we were asked not only by our sector stakeholders but also by operators in a town hall to move forward now. We've got to get rid of red tape, we've got to make sure that this sector is viable, and we're going to continue working with the federal government on making sure child care is available for Alberta parents. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore is the only one with the call.

### Calgary Fiscal Policies

**Ms Issik:** Mr. Speaker, with half of Calgary's small and medium businesses on the brink of collapse and with so many Calgarians out of work and unable to make rent, the Calgary city council decided to continue their reckless fiscal management. Downtown Beltline apartment buildings could face a tax hike of up to 40 per cent. Make no mistake; at the earliest possible opportunity that increase is going to be flowed right directly to renters. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the provincial government going to do to rein in a reckless Calgary city council?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that important question. I have been crystal clear with Calgary city council and councils across our province that we cannot tax our way out of a recession. Despite this pandemic the province is managing to keep taxes low, deliver essential services, and streamline our

operations. Our expectation is that our municipalities will do the same, and we are starting to see positive signs on this front.

**Ms Issik:** Mr. Speaker, given the work of the provincial government to decrease taxes and that a tax hike is especially harmful while Albertans are financially down because of low oil prices and the pandemic and given that the city of Calgary is undermining this with a massive tax hike, which will also result in increased rents, and given that our government reduced education property taxes – but Calgary residents have not seen this flow through – to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will the government step in to stop the city of Calgary's massive tax hike?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has set a clear expectation for how we support our people at this difficult time. Lower taxes isn't just a Conservative value; it is an Alberta value. Politicians who increase taxes on Albertans at difficult times would need to answer to those same Albertans in elections. We must always remember that there is only one taxpayer, and ultimately that taxpayer is the boss.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Issik:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the city of Calgary has one of the most bloated government budgets in the country, which includes not one but two pensions for the mayor, and given that there is no indication they are seriously attempting to reduce spending whatsoever, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what will the government do to impose fiscal transparency at Calgary city hall?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among other things we have committed to introducing a municipal measurement index, which will empower voters to compare things like tax rates with similar jurisdictions. The municipal measurement index will increase transparency for all Albertans regardless of the communities where they live. This is something that we promised to deliver, and it's another promise that we are going to keep. I look forward to making this announcement as soon as possible.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has the call.

### Arts Programming and Funding

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to see the news release sent at 10:03 a.m. today from the minister of culture announcing Alberta spotlight. This will provide online concerts showcasing Alberta talent. This is a good first and logical step. We should know since we did it last week. The Leader of the Opposition and Alberta's culture critic hosted a showcase with local artists. This announcement is a good first step, but to the minister of culture: what took you so long?

**Mrs. Aheer:** Well, thank you for the first half of that question. It actually, like most things, takes a while to be able to meet and consult with all of these different organizations. As the member knows, there isn't just one type of musician, artist, or others in this province. In fact, they are some of the largest entrepreneurial groups that we have in this province, which means that there are several different conversations that we have to have to understand how best to support them. This is just one of those initiatives.

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

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a few weeks ago our caucus made multiple calls to support the arts industry based on countless conversations with artists, given that the Alberta spotlight plan focuses on those in the music industry – I hope the minister has a plan to support all artists – and given that the minister is clearly finally starting to listen to artists and to the opposition, will she now commit to refunding \$3 million that have been cut to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and expanding what artists can do with the funding during the pandemic?

2:30

**Mrs. Aheer:** Mr. Speaker, the budget that was released for Budget 2020 is the budget that we are following through with. I know that the member knows this as well, but I will reiterate this yet again: the AFA is independent of the government of Alberta. The dollars that they flow to the organizations and groups that are supported by the AFA are done by the AFA independent of the government. I can say it a hundred more times. Happy to do so.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the arts industry generates over \$5 billion for our economy and employs nearly 60,000 people and given that when we first called for an artist on the economic recovery panel, the Premier's office laughed at us, mocked the livelihood of artists and their contribution to the province – then the artists laughed at the UCP's lack of knowledge and awareness of the economic value of art – and given that the UCP has claimed to be looking at ways to diversify the economy, will the minister commit to putting an artist, not a representative for artists, on the recovery panel?

**Mrs. Aheer:** It's another day, Mr. Speaker, where the facts are being yet again misrepresented. Peter Kiss is an absolutely massive advocate for the arts and also works in the business sector. If the member looks at how the arts and the business sectors work together, they are intertwined and absolutely necessary for both to work together. It's absolutely imperative that these organizations are working together, because the arts are actually supported by oil and gas, agriculture, and all of the other industries that that government spent four years destroying.

### Education Funding for Students with Special Needs

**Ms Phillips:** A couple of weeks ago the Lethbridge school division released a preliminary budget. Support staff positions are being reduced by almost 41 positions, of which 31 are educational assistant positions lost. The Lethbridge board says that these losses are due to funding cuts from the province. The government says: there aren't any cuts. Can the minister explain why Lethbridge EAs are getting pink slips if there are no cuts, or is the minister's real agenda to saddle young families with even more school fees to pay for these services on top of the fact that the government has jackknifed our income tax, property tax, bus fees, and car insurance?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, again, misrepresentation. Every school division in this province in the new 2020-21 school budget will see an increase in their funding. The school boards are in charge of their budgets, and they make the decisions for their local communities.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you. Given that the Lethbridge school division blamed the loss of 31 EAs directly on reductions to program unit funding, which the government says isn't being cut – that's weird – is this minister's real plan to add to their UCP hikes to our income tax, property tax, school fees, bus fees, and car insurance by forcing parents to pay privately for support for their children with complex needs?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, the program unit funding, as I've said many times over, remains a vital part of our new funding model. Kindergarten students continue to receive support under the new specialized learning supports grant. We continue to recognize the importance of early intervention, and Alberta continues to have the earliest intervention program for children in Canada, at two years, eight months. I can't be any clearer. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. There's only one person shouting in this Chamber.

**Ms Phillips:** Given that one Lethbridge mom said that, quote, taking PUF away from students is robbing them of potential we don't know they have yet and that another Lethbridge mom said that without the proper support her son wouldn't be thriving, that he would be shriveling, why is this Education minister making life so difficult for parents, particularly families with kids with complex needs? Isn't life hard enough with the tax and fee hikes? When will the UCP get tired of having their hand in our pockets and making life harder for parents and families?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, I will continue to reiterate the fact that eligibility for PUF has not changed, and the funding cap remains at \$25,000 per student. Students with severe learning delays will continue to receive funding at the same level as they do today, and we've also matched speech-language funding to actual need, ensuring that students continue to receive the supports they require to succeed. We are committed to early intervention for our most vulnerable students.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler has the call.

### Economic Recovery

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Finance has previously mentioned in this House, January and February were proof that our economic strategy was working. However, the COVID-19 crisis has drastically altered Alberta's reality by increasing the unemployment rate to 15 and a half per cent and forcing many businesses to close. We know this will be compounded by the end of the federal CERB assistance come August. To the Minister of Finance: can you please inform this House how our government will get Alberta's economy back on track and how we will get Albertans back to work?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The member was quite right. In the first two months of 2020 early economic indicators really demonstrated that our economy was in fact growing. The number of drilling rigs had increased, building permits were up, goods exports were up, and retail sales were up, all up year over year. Our policies were working, our economy was improving, and investment was

returning to Alberta. As we recover from the COVID economic crisis, we'll continue to create the most competitive business environment in the country.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in April the Bank of Canada reported that it needed to take more extensive measures to handle the sudden and deep contraction in the economy through increased lending to financial institutions and governments and given that due to liquidity concerns, the oil price downturn, and the lack of international economic activity there is now concern for the housing market and housing prices, to the Minister of Finance: how does the potential lack of liquidity and the risk of a housing downturn affect Alberta's economic recovery?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the economic crisis hit, the first thing we heard from businesses was the need for liquidity, the need for additional capital. That's why we moved quickly to provide liquidity relief for individuals and businesses through the corporate income tax deferral, the Workers' Compensation Board premium deferrals and paying half of medium-sized businesses' WCB premiums, freezing and deferring education property taxes, and ensuring the ATB offered flexibility with their loan deferrals and payments.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the Premier's address to the province in April he said, "The end of the pandemic will not be the end of the economic downturn, the likes of which we have not seen since the 1930s." Given the circumstances and challenges facing Alberta as we begin to recover from the pandemic and given that in the conversations that I've had with Albertans, it is clear that many don't realize just how bad this could get, to the Minister of Finance: can you please inform this House on the unique challenges that Alberta is facing and how our government plans to overcome them?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. COVID-19 changed the world in a matter of weeks. The global economy contracted, and Alberta was not spared. Demand for our exports diminished, stock markets crashed, and Alberta businesses suffered. We've introduced a number and series of programs in response to the crisis, and we'll be releasing an economic plan in the coming weeks that will guide our recovery. I'm confident that Alberta has a bright and hopeful future because of the resilient, resourceful character of its people.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has risen with a question.

### Transportation Capital Projects

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government announced a plan on April 9 designed to get Alberta and its citizens back to work. The government allocated nearly \$2 billion for various projects, including improving the highways in southern Alberta. Can the Minister of Transportation please tell the House how the government plans to improve southern Alberta highways with this funding?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. Our government did set aside \$2 billion, as part of our response to COVID-19, to resurface roads, repair bridges, fill potholes, and, for other ministries, restore schools to get thousands of Albertans back to work quickly and safely. By focusing on maintenance and renewal projects, we're making sure that we get work done now that needs doing while making sure that the important infrastructure is there for years and decades to come for the economic recovery.

2:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the pandemic has really impacted the Alberta economy and given that much of our provincial workforce is just now starting to return to their jobs or looking for new employment, what is the government's plan to ensure that these Albertans can use their skills and expertise in these new projects to get themselves working again?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the infrastructure investments we're making are focused on projects that can get started quickly because Albertans need the jobs today. We're fixing our highways, keeping companies operating on those highways, and, most importantly, keeping Albertans working. In the longer term, while we're creating over 3,000 direct and indirect jobs now through maintenance and renewal projects on highways, bridges, and potholes, what we're really doing is building a base for Alberta's recovery to come, not only now but in decades to come. Our children and grandchildren will pay some of the money back that we're spending, and they need the benefit as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of these projects are occurring in a short time and moving as quickly as possible and given that highways will still need to be used during our relaunch and given that many of these highways are vital connections between our communities, what is the government doing to make sure that delays for Albertans getting back to work in other industries that rely on these highway networks are kept to a minimum?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right: when you do construction, there's no doubt that there's a certain level of inconvenience. As Albertans are travelling the roads this summer, I'm sure that they will many times have to slow down – and please do slow down in those construction zones because you're keeping your fellow Albertans safe as well as yourself – but we try to plan around that to do this in an organized way. As Alberta gets back to work, we want to make sure that they're safe, that driving conditions during that time are good, that they maximize the recovery of our economy. Right now we need to get as much right as we can because Albertans are hurting, and we need to help.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will return to Members' Statements.

## Members' Statements

(continued)

### Transportation Capital Projects in Lesser Slave Lake

**Mr. Rehn:** Mr. Speaker, throughout the past several weeks the COVID-19 pandemic has been at the forefront of most Albertans' minds, and rightly so. However, there has been one other topic in my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake that has dominated discussions: roads. Not a day goes by where I don't hear from constituents who are concerned about the road conditions, most notably highway 749, highway 2, and highway 88 in the Slave Lake area. People are concerned for the safety of their families and concerned about the mounting costs for them just to their vehicles due to potholes and the overall condition of the roads. Albertans in northern regions spend a vast amount of time on the road taking their kids to school, picking up groceries, going to work, or even filling up with a tank of gas. Trips that take mere minutes in urban areas can take hours for people in Lesser Slave Lake.

Though there is always more that needs to be done, I was extremely pleased to hear the announcement last month from the Ministry of Transportation about the road maintenance projects throughout Alberta but particularly in Lesser Slave Lake. These maintenance projects are the good-news stories that people in Lesser Slave Lake and all of Alberta need to hear right now. This investment into Alberta's transportation infrastructure not only creates jobs and helps stimulate the economy, but it shows Albertans that despite being caught in the middle of a global pandemic, our government is listening to the everyday concerns of Albertans and is committed to keeping our campaign promise of getting people back to work and focusing on infrastructure projects that are key to the economic growth and stability of our province.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Lesser Slave Lake I would like to thank the minister for his commitment to keeping Alberta drivers safe. I'm looking forward to getting the shovels in the ground.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

### Veterinarians

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The coronavirus outbreak has brought so much change across the world, including here in Alberta. It has impacted our health, the economy, and families, including our animals. Through it all there have been many unsung heroes that have continued to deliver services in new, adaptive ways and have ensured the safety of workers, owners, and our animals.

I want to recognize the work of our veterinary medical professionals, who are responsible for maintaining the health and welfare of animals and the security of our food supply. The veterinary medical profession has been a steadfast front line for our animals and their owners. My constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is the backbone of Alberta's agricultural sector and home to thousands of animals, both livestock and companion animals.

The pandemic has produced an uptick in animal ownership. Veterinary clinics have been adapting to the current environment by using telemedicine and curbside service to ensure public health protocols are enforced while keeping our animals healthy. Over 3,800 Alberta veterinary professionals operating in 550 practices are facing significant shortages, yet they remain diligently working in our communities across this province throughout the pandemic. These professionals are providing critical service delivery to our

food animal, mixed animal, equine, companion animal, education, zoo, and wildlife sectors.

Veterinary medicine has been a vital partner to Albertans in the good times, but it is in the times of emergency that we recognize how critical the profession is to public health, safety, and economic sustainability in our province. I want to recognize all of the members of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association for their adaptations and ongoing commitment to being our front-line workers for animal health. You are essential to our local producers, local economies, and the future economic recovery and growth in Alberta.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane is rising with a statement.

### Huawei Technologies Company

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans feel unease over the security of our communication systems. The move to 5G networks has intelligence agencies concerned about national security risks from unreliable vendors. The U.S. is warning members of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance against the use of Huawei products in their network infrastructure. They cite China as posing significant risk to the exploitation of military, government, and corporate secrets. Five Eyes members the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. have all said no to Huawei. The only country yet to decide is, of course under the Liberals, Canada.

As usual the Trudeau government is dragging its feet when it comes to protecting Canadians, as we saw with their delayed response to the pandemic. Proceeding with Huawei not only risks data integrity but also the loss of access to classified Five Eyes intelligence.

China has thrived in part on reverse engineering intellectual property, providing them an unfair advantage. In Hong Kong they interfere with democracy and seek to unlawfully arrest and extradite those who object to the communist regime. With this history it's surprising that China is a leading voice at the World Trade Organization and the human rights council.

That said, Huawei assures us that their 5G network will not be used for the purpose of espionage, yet charges against Huawei executives indicate accusations of racketeering, money laundering, and conspiracy to steal trade secrets. Fortunately, last week industry players Bell, Telus, and Rogers, sharing these concerns, decided against the use of Huawei products.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 shed a light on the importance of protecting national interests. Canada needs to follow industry's lead and say no to dictatorial regimes, stay in the Five Eyes alliance, and keep our data secure.

Thank you.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has a tabling.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Glenora I rise to table five copies of the letter she referenced in her question today from two brothers, one of whom is a disabled Albertan, asking Premier Kenney not to attend their graduation.

**The Speaker:** Are there other tablings? Just a reminder to members, once your tabling has been completed, if you'll place it in the tabling boxes on the tabling tables, that would be excellent.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.



**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, a post by the Premier dated January 1, 2015. "Today the political party per vote subsidy, which cost taxpayers \$25 million a year, is history. Now party contributions are voluntary, not mandatory."

2:50

**The Speaker:** Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table requisite copies of four different letters of support for Bill 201, Strategic Aviation Advisory Council Act. The first one is from Delphi Aeronautics' Mr. Alan Tay, a president who strongly supports the bill.

The second is for the Alberta provincial committee of the air cadets from their chairperson, Ms Barraclough, who also strongly supports the bill in support of the work that they are doing.

One is from Jerry Klammer, who is a member of the Alberta Aviation Council, in support of Bill 201.

Last but certainly not least, from founder Kimberley Van Vliet and president Brad Robson of Wavv beyond business borders, a technology and aeronautics and aerospace-based company, who also strongly support the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to submit the requisite number of documents of a tweet by the Premier, dated May 22, 2016, in which he says, "I fought for years to cut taxpayer funding of political parties. Delighted we got it done!" Irony given their present behaviour.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there other tablings?

Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

## Orders of the Day

### Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### Bill 17 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 17, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020.

It's a privilege to rise and speak about this important piece of legislation. It's my hope that Bill 17 will gain the support of all members of the Assembly. The Mental Health Act allows for people with serious mental health disorders to be involuntarily detained in a facility for treatment or to receive mandatory treatment in the community. Detaining someone under this legislation is intended to be a last resort to help treat those with serious mental disorders who are likely to cause harm to themselves or others.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Now, Bill 17, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020, would bring in changes to strengthen the existing protections of patients' rights. These changes are necessary to address a 2019 decision of the Court of Queen's Bench, which found sections of the Mental

Health Act unconstitutional or incomplete. Mr. Speaker, it's protecting patients' rights which is our government's first priority.

As we engage in a significant expansion of mental health and addiction services in this province, we must take all necessary steps to strengthen the protection of these rights. To do this, the amendments in Bill 17 would define and clarify several terms, including "treatment," "secure location," and "qualified health professional." Now, defining the term "treatment" for the first time is important because it will clarify when a person can be detained. The act will now require that a person be able to benefit from a treatment in order to be detained. Now, defining the term "qualified health professional" is important because for the first time under the act nurse practitioners will be able to assess, be able to examine, and be able to supervise patients. But to ensure the highest level of patient care, some measures taken under the act will still require physician oversight.

Defining "secure locations": well, this opens the door in the future to increasing the number of places to which law enforcement can take people to be examined, to be assessed. This would reduce travel and wait times for patients, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, further defining "mental disorder": this will clarify who the legislation is intended to support. For example, someone with a brain injury could not be detained under the act; however, if the patient has both a brain injury and a mental health disorder, then the patient would still benefit from mental health care and could be detained.

The Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020, would also permit health professionals to provide information to a close family member of a detained individual. Often the job of caring for a person with a mental disorder falls to family members. These family members shouldn't be kept in the dark about their loved one's mental health in such a critical time. Hospitals and health care facilities would also be required to provide more information directly to the person being detained. This includes free, timely access to their medical records, information about and access to free legal counsel if necessary, and information about the Mental Health Patient Advocate.

Changes to the role of the Mental Health Patient Advocate mean that the advocate will contact each patient who wants their help. The advocate will also work more closely with AHS to make sure that patients and their families get information that they need. The act will also better protect long-term patients by ensuring that they receive treatment plans so that they can understand the nature of the care that they can expect to receive, and the forms that are used for their detention will be reviewed to ensure patients and their families receive complete information.

Mr. Speaker, providing this information and support should be a given, and we are proud to be codifying it as a legal requirement. To this end, government will now have the ability to require that Alberta Health Services report on matters that fall under the act, and we're giving the mental health review panels more power to tailor solutions to help long-term patients reintegrate into the community.

We're also modernizing our legislation. Proposed amendments would allow for some examinations and assessments to be conducted using video conferencing technology where appropriate. Frankly, this use of technology is long overdue. A person can't be detained for longer than 24 hours unless they have been examined in two separate situations and found to meet admission criteria by two separate health professionals. Using video conferencing would help to ensure that these examinations take place in a more timely manner. It may also mean that a person won't need to be transported, in some cases for hours, to get to a facility to be assessed in person just to find out that they don't actually meet the criteria and be released hours from where they were picked up.

As you can see, these proposed amendments are not only necessary to address the 2019 court decision, but they're also necessary to safeguard the rights of patients and make our mental health system more responsive and accessible. As a result of these changes patient care will be more timely and patient-focused, and families will be able to support and care for their loved ones in a more significant way.

I encourage all Members of the Legislative Assembly to support second reading of Bill 17, and I look forward to debating this bill with my hon. colleagues in the future. Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 17, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. minister.

We are debating second reading of Bill 17, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020. Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen to join.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in second reading today of Bill 17, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020. I thank the minister for introducing this act and for bringing this bill forward for discussion and debate in the House. I also appreciate the comments that the minister provided, providing an overview of the contents of the act. It is – well, it's not the biggest bill that we've had to review this session. It is substantive because it does address so many different parts of our current mental health system as well as responding, as the minister noted, to a decision by the Alberta courts in J.H. versus Alberta Health Services, which was a July 2019 decision that I believe the minister indicated that portions of this act are intended to respond to.

I'd like to take a moment first, Mr. Speaker, to simply state that we are happy to see legislation coming forward that will make changes and will consider and review portions of the Mental Health Act. Certainly, we know that there have been concerns with certain sections of the act and how they've been applied. I'm very proud to be part of the Official Opposition caucus, which has repeatedly put mental health issues and taking those concerns seriously at the forefront of the actions that they took as government. We continue to put it at the forefront of our work as opposition as well.

Mental health is something that for far too long was ignored by many jurisdictions across the continent, certainly not unique to Alberta, as the real health crisis that it is. What I've actually taken some heart in during the troubling and challenging times of the pandemic has been to hear how much mental health was immediately identified at the forefront as something that we need to be alive to. I can tell you, as somebody who grew up in the school system in this province, that I didn't hear mental health talked about. Now we're hearing it right away when we're talking about how our children, for example, are experiencing and managing the stress of this time. At the forefront of those discussions is mental health. We realize now that we're putting it as part of that holistic health and well-being of everybody, including children, mental health. I do hope that we will see some concrete commitments from this government going forward on pieces specifically about children's mental health, particularly as they go back to school, and we need the resources in our system to support students as they return to school.

3:00

Back to the bill before us today, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to see the legislation coming forward, but there are a number of questions arising from the bill that we hope to have a fulsome discussion and debate on within this Assembly as the bill goes forward.

In particular, I want to note that there are a few questions that we have already, specifically to the court case, which I believe the minister referred to but I suspect was probably a likely reason for the timing of this bill right now. We know that the decision in J.H. versus Alberta Health Services was a decision that struck down portions of the current Mental Health Act and provided, essentially, the Legislature, the Legislative Assembly, and the government to bring forward amendments to that Mental Health Act within a 12-month period of time. That decision was issued, I believe, July 2019. Of course, here we are, June 2020, with the process ahead of us of debate in this House.

I imagine that that is the reason why the timing of this bill, but there are questions about it that I have, particularly because the decision in J.H. versus AHS was quite specific about which sections of the current Mental Health Act were struck down and actually ruled to be of no force and effect. In particular, I note that section 2, for example, of the current Mental Health Act, which sets out the requirements for an admission certificate – this is when a person is admitted to a mental health facility or a hospital for treatment; detained, really. That provision, section 2, was struck down by the court, and we do see amendments brought forward within Bill 17 that specifically address section 2 of the current Mental Health Act.

As well, in the decision in J.H. versus AHS the court's decision struck down section 8(1) and section 8(3) of the Mental Health Act, which dealt with renewal certificates. However, when we look at what's being put forward in Bill 17, section 8(1) of the Mental Health Act is amended by Bill 17; however, section 8(3) is not amended by this bill. Neither are sections 4(1) and (2) or section 7, which deals with the effect of one admission certificate or the effect of two admission certificates. Neither of these sections, which were struck down by the court in its decision and now will be of no force and effect as of July 2020, have been amended by Bill 17.

Now, I simply raise this because if this bill is intended specifically to respond to that court decision, it raises some questions about: well, why were some of the sections that were struck down by the court not amended? I hope that the minister will stand up and walk us through how those provisions are still reflected or the intent of those provisions in the Mental Health Act, which were struck down by the court. Perhaps they've been incorporated in another way into the Mental Health Act by virtue of this bill. It's not immediately evident to myself, but I admit that, you know, this is a new piece of legislation for me, and it is a bit of – this is the work that we do as legislators. We do look at the existing act, the new bill, as well as the court decision and see how those pieces fit together. But that's immediately one of the questions that comes to mind because this, the timing of it in particular, seems to be in response to that decision.

That decision, of course – I just want to go back for those who may be listening and watching, and I'm sure there are actually quite a few people who work in mental health as practitioners or have a loved one or themselves experience mental health challenges who might have questions about this. They might want to know a little bit of background about the decision in J.H. versus AHS. My apologies. I'm just finding that in my notes.

This was a decision that came out of an action in September 2014, where an individual, who, I believe, had an existing brain injury, was then detained by an admission certificate at Calgary Foothills medical centre for almost, oh, I guess it was – I'm looking at it – probably about eight months or nine months. That decision to detain, and the process that that individual went through, was the subject of this court hearing. In its decision the judge ruled, as I indicated, that there were a number of sections of the Mental Health Act that were unconstitutional and therefore were struck down. But

as I indicated, Bill 17 does not seem to reflect amendments to all of the sections that were struck down.

I also am aware, Mr. Speaker, that this ruling is currently under appeal and that a decision may be issued. I appreciate that with COVID-19 certainly certain decisions will be delayed, but I think it's anticipated that a ruling would be made sometime later this fall. I don't know whether or not the minister can shed light on this, about why perhaps some provisions in this act were not amended, if that was related to the fact that this ruling is under appeal. It does raise some questions as to why.

There were other provisions within the ruling of the judge in J.H. versus AHS where the judge indicated that there were some other provisions that weren't struck down, that were not ruled unconstitutional but certainly encouraged the government to review them. Those are specifically section 38 and section 41 of the Mental Health Act, which deal with review panels. Now, I do note that there do seem to be amendments made to those provisions, and there seems to be actually the addition in Bill 17 of section 38(1). I imagine that that's meant to address that, but I think we need to have a fulsome discussion about what the direction was of the court and how these amendments meet those directions by the court.

I note that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Manning will speak to this quite passionately because, of course, she's been working in the area of mental health long before she was actually an elected official. She's done a lot of work as a social worker, and she's very passionate about these issues. She has noted that the court's decision in J.H. versus AHS actually also strongly recommends that there be some definition of harm incorporated into the Mental Health Act. We don't see that as part of Bill 17. Again, I'm hoping that when we get into Committee of the Whole, perhaps – if, of course. I do not want to presume that this bill will pass second reading. Of course, we can't make those presumptions. But should it pass and we get into Committee of the Whole, I would like to hear from the minister as to why certain directions from the justice in that decision were followed and were incorporated directly into Bill 17 as well as why certain provisions weren't.

In addition to responding to that ruling, I note that the minister indicates that there were several other intentions behind the amendments here in Bill 17; for example, expanding those who would be able to assess, examine, and supervise patients receiving community treatment. I know, for example, that, I believe, there's a broader definition of "qualified health care professional" incorporated into Bill 17. I would like to certainly hear from some of those in the expanded category of medical or health care professionals, to hear about what their view is about their role in these kinds of assessments and whether they are in support of having this broader authority to do that.

The minister noted a number of times nurse practitioners – and I noted that as well – as being one category of health care professional that is now going to have this broader capacity to be involved in assessing and examining patients. But I note that the definition that's actually set out in Bill 17, the new definition – I believe that the minister referenced it – with respect to who a qualified health care professional is, is quite broader than just nurse practitioners. At least, that's how I read it. Yes. Thank you. My esteemed colleague from St. Albert is nodding. She flagged that for me, and I appreciate that very much because it's true.

It actually says a "qualified health professional" – my apologies, Mr. Speaker. I'm reading from Bill 17, and this is section 2 of the bill, amending section 1 of the Mental Health Act. It defines a "qualified health professional" [as] a physician or nurse practitioner or a person who is registered under section 33(1)(a) of the Health Professions Act as a member of a health profession or of a category within a health profession." That's actually quite a broad

group of individuals. We know that there are quite a few practitioners in the health care world that are regulated.

3:10

I recall, actually, taking a little bit of a look at section 33(1)(a) of the Health Professions Act when we were considering it in this House and, as I'm a member of the private members' bills committee, when we were considering Bill 207 because that also provided broad authority to reject, in that case, the provision of health care services to certain individuals. I remember noting how broad that scope of professionals actually is. It actually included, I believe, social workers, if I was correct, and physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists. It's quite a broad category of individuals.

Again, I believe these professions all play a significant role in our mental health care system and the supports for individuals, but whether or not they should be, I guess, within this new definition is a question that I have. I'm not saying yes or no. I guess I'm saying that this is a significant change. It's much broader – it's not just nurse practitioners – therefore, I would like to hear from those colleges and those professions to see about their role and what they view about this. I don't know. Perhaps the minister will shed some light on whether or not he's already done that consultation with those professions to see whether or not they believe that they should have an expanded role in terms of issuance of admission certificates and being involved in detentions of individuals with mental health conditions.

That's a very important question that I have, along with, as I mentioned earlier, why certain provisions and certain sections within the Mental Health Act were not amended as suggested and in fact required by the courts.

I understand there was a sunshine clause that was originally within the Mental Health Act. Again, on first reading it appears that it's no longer there, so I would like to hear some discussion about that.

You know, I do appreciate that the minister talked about greater access to information for those people who support those with mental health conditions – we know that within our current system those people who do have significant mental health conditions do require support – and making sure that there is, I guess, appropriate information to the appropriate people. But I want to make sure there are safeguards. Whenever we're talking about disclosing really deeply personal health information, especially around mental health, we want to be very careful, of course, as to how that's categorized and who has access to that. I think that in general we need to make sure that the people who are there to support individuals with mental health conditions do get the support they need, and if that requires greater information disclosure, that's important.

I do note that I have questions, I suppose I should say, that the bill revises admission criteria, so only people whose disorder can be improved by treatment can be detained. So I understand, for example, that patients with permanent brain damage, such as those with fetal alcohol syndrome disorder or a stroke, could no longer be detained unless they have, in addition to that, mental disorders such as, for example, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. I just have questions about that. I need to understand that a little bit more in terms of – I believe that's a response to the court case, but I know a number of my colleagues work very closely with stakeholders who work with individuals with brain injuries and would probably have some feedback on that. I'd like to hear about that, and I'd like the opportunity for stakeholders to have the time to review this bill as well and provide their input.

You know, I note, of course, that there are provisions in here that are intended to, I guess, reduce red tape: more time for physicians

and patients to co-ordinate examinations, no longer requiring forms to move patients between two Alberta Health Services facilities, and authorizing the minister to designate and classify facilities so the health system can be more responsive. That sounds good, but, again, I'd like to hear a little bit more from the minister about what the need was that that was addressing.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, you know, again, I think I've raised the questions already. I think we do want to see a stronger Mental Health Act, one that is more responsive to conditions. We don't want people who have mental health conditions to be detained improperly, unnecessarily, and, of course, unconstitutionally. I do think it's very important that we continue to respect those rights of individuals with mental health conditions and make sure that they are treated with dignity and respect in our system, and we want to provide the best level of care we can. I just simply have questions as to why certain things were not incorporated in this bill that seem to have been required by the courts.

I look forward to a fulsome discussion as well as the opportunity for our caucus members in particular to hear from some stakeholders with respect to their response to this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I see the — unfortunately, there is not a 29(2)(a). I expect that perhaps you might catch my eye after the next speaker.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 17, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020. Like my colleague, I think that I do have a number of questions, a number of questions that I could not answer simply by going through the legislation and then looking through the other pieces that were noted in this amendment act. Hopefully, the minister is keeping notes and is keeping track of the questions that we are asking. I think that an important piece of legislation like this, that really does impact the life and death of Albertans: it is essential that we have the information so that we can vote accordingly and decide whether or not we support this piece of legislation.

I'm just going to add to my colleague's questions. I do have a number of questions. First of all, my first question is really — I would really like to know. I am going to give the government the benefit of the doubt and assume that there was consultation that was done before this amendment act was put together, so I would love to hear from the government who precisely the consultation was with. Certainly, in the legislation it talks a lot about — the examples that are used are people with traumatic brain injury, whether they've sustained a stroke or are schizophrenic, have a diagnosis of schizophrenia. I would like to know specifically which organizations or which individuals were consulted. If at all possible, if those organizations were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the changes, it would be quite helpful to see perhaps a summary of that information. I think it is one thing to have lawyers and legislators looking at legislation and putting together legislation; it is quite another to have professionals that are on the ground doing the work also provide that feedback. That would be quite helpful.

Again I want to sort of echo what my colleague said about why there seemed to be a deliberate leaving out of the mention or definition of "harm." I think that that is incredibly important. I certainly didn't have enough time to go through the 45-page document that was available. It was J.H. versus Alberta Health Services. Certainly, the document references many times the

importance of understanding and defining harm in a multitude of settings. So that would be a question that I would like answered.

Another question: why not put an updated clause with a statutory review?

Again, going back to what my colleague mentioned earlier, on page 2 of the bill, it does note that qualified health practitioner means a physician or nurse practitioner or a person who is registered under section 33(1)(a) of the Health Professions Act as a member of a health profession or of a category within a health profession designated by the regulations for the purposes of all or part of this Act.

Now, perhaps I'm missing something, and hopefully the minister will be able to clarify this when he has an opportunity to speak. Checking in the Health Professions Act, looking at this section, it doesn't give me a lot of clarity about what the intent of this piece is, so I'm not really sure. I understand that the intent of "qualified health professional" means expanding to include a nurse practitioner or another person registered under the act. As my colleague noted, that includes a whole lot of people, so it would be really nice to know who exactly this piece of legislation intended to point to because it's not very clear to me.

3:20

What we're hearing from the government is that if Bill 17 was passed and approved, it would revise the admission criteria so only people whose disorder could be improved by treatment can be detained. I believe the examples given were patients with permanent brain injury such as people with fetal alcohol syndrome, et cetera; stroke; could no longer be detained unless they have mental disorders such as schizophrenia, et cetera. I guess, because this is such a large category and I think science and research has advanced so much, it would actually be really helpful to have the minister stand up and expand that definition and give us more examples of what precisely that entails or what that covers.

I also am a little bit concerned. A number of times, again, I'm looking through the legislation trying to find more specific information. When it says that the disorder could be improved by treatment, I think that is certainly subjective, and I think that when you add to that the uncertainty around which health profession will be making some really significant decisions and treatment decisions, a better definition of this would be helpful. I'm certainly not asking for whatever assessment tool would be used or anything like that, but certainly a better definition or better description of what that means would be most helpful.

I want to move ahead a little bit to the portion that talks about — the minister noted that this legislation would strengthen patient rights. I would like to talk about that. Bill 17 would in theory require hospitals and health care facilities to provide patients with free, timely access to a number of different things, which is important, obviously. Just looking through this particular case that seems to have triggered these changes, there certainly were a lot of things that were missed. However, this would give patients access — free, timely access — to medical records, information about legal counsel, including access to free legal counsel if applicable.

I think if you ever needed more proof that adequately funding things like legal aid are certainly important — to review forms in a timely way so that patients know why they are detained: certainly, that was not done. Again, it doesn't seem to have been done in this particular case. To provide a treatment plan to patients staying in hospital for 30 days or more, including criteria for release: these are all good things. Treatment plans are great things. Criteria for release are certainly vitally important if you are the people charged with making this decision.

But I would like to add another piece, and I do think it relates to this. It's because it is one thing to meet criteria to release someone; it is quite another to discharge them without supports. Again, what was interesting about this particular document, and that was J.H. versus Alberta Health Services: at the very beginning of the document it described sort of, you know, what happened. One of the things: certainly, after an accident and after treatment the person describes a situation where they're released because of loss of income, loss of housing, resulting in homelessness – I'm making a few assumptions here because I'm not quoting the document directly – but then obviously there were some substance abuse issues.

I think it really underlines the importance of: if you are going to look at – if you are truly going to stand up in this place and say that this piece of legislation, the focus of this legislation is to support or to do as much as we can to support mental health patients in this case, we have to talk about discharge planning and discharge supports or the supports that people will need once they are discharged, because far too often – and sadly I have seen this. It's actually difficult sometimes to get people the help they need for them to be able to stay in a facility for longer than a few days.

But if they are able to get the help that they need once they are discharged and meet whatever criteria, it's just another cycle because the housing isn't there. The income isn't there. Let's say, perhaps, somebody on AISH. They are on AISH benefits. Let's say that they have a traumatic brain injury. They've qualified for AISH. Something else has come up. There's a mental health disorder, whatever, that's mentioned in this piece of legislation. They're in hospital for, say, 90 days. Their AISH benefits are stopped. What that means is that they're no longer able to, let's say, continue paying for their rent of their apartment. They lose all kinds of things.

These are the things that need to be in place. I think if we're going to talk about being very careful while people are in treatment when the goal is that you want them to be healthy enough to go into the community – you don't want them back, or you don't want them back quickly – if that is the cycle, you want to delay that as much as possible, and the way that you do that is that you invest in community supports. Sadly, there's not a lot of mention of that here, but it's also not been – this government has not done a great job, actually, on expanding and sustaining community supports that keep people out of hospital and other facilities.

In addition, I'm also glad that the Mental Health Patient Advocate was not one of the pieces of legislation or roles that were rolled up into, like, the Health Advocate and the Seniors Advocate, that were, you know, assigned to a party insider. I'm glad this is a separate person with expertise that is able to do this work. I am glad, as the minister said, that all patients who reach out, need this assistance will get it. That's good news.

One of the other changes, actually, that was interesting and good – again, I look forward to hearing more about this – is that patients will be given 30 days as opposed to 14 to review the panel's decision, which is good, and allowing a review panel to order a facility to issue a community treatment order instead of detaining a patient when doing so is more appropriate and order additional independent psychiatric opinions if needed is also good.

Now, I also read in this legislation, one of the things: a secure location or a treatment facility is anything that is done for a therapeutic, preventive, or other health-related purpose, including the implementation of a treatment plan described – I don't remember where the section is, but it seems to me that the minister was granted some extended ability to designate a facility. If the minister could talk about that a little bit when he has the opportunity to do so.

That is about all of my comments for today, so I'm going to sit down and pass my time on to my colleague.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member. Just prior to 29(2)(a), I think I might have misheard something. Did you refer to a separate document as well during that?

**Ms Renaud:** Several, probably. Yeah.

**The Acting Speaker:** Could you table those at the appropriate time?

**Ms Renaud:** It's legislation.

**The Acting Speaker:** Okay. Perfect. Yeah. That's what I was trying for.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, and I see the hon. Minister of Health has risen.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite a few questions. I'll try and get through as quickly as I can. Regarding Edmonton-Whitemud's questions, I was asked about concrete commitments for mental health supports, especially specific to COVID and with children. I point out our April 15 announcement of \$53 million. If one were to add up all the additional mental health supports during COVID that every other province has announced, add them all up and multiply by two, you get to about what we provided to Albertans in what we announced on April 15. Included in that is \$21.6 million, which was to improve access to a number of supports. That includes the Kids Help Phone, so there's quite a bit in there as well that was included to provide additional supports for children.

Regarding the question of timing and whether it had something to do with the fact that this is under appeal right now and the decision of the court from 2019, the answer is no. Mr. Speaker, I would have really liked to have tabled this back in early March, but COVID changed a lot of our legislative agenda, and here we are now in June, unfortunately, months later, having to table this.

Look, the fact that it's under appeal really doesn't change much for us at all as government regardless of what the J.H. decision says. Yes, we did appeal it because it determined that the act contravened the Charter rights of patients, but at the same time we generally agree with the principles that are included in this legislation regardless of the decision of the Court of Queen's Bench.

3:30

There's a question about qualified health professionals, and the hon. member is correct, but I think she missed reading the remainder of the section that's included in Bill 17. Bill 17 says, if she notes, that it "means a physician or nurse practitioner [or a member of a profession] or a person who is registered under . . . the Health Professions Act as a member of a health profession . . . [which is] designated by the regulations." So it allows a government to have the flexibility at a future date, for example, if there's an expansion of scope for another health profession in the future or we have a new health profession. Say, for example, if physician assistants at some point become a health profession and a government determines that that health profession could assist in this act for an assessment, for example, then there could be the flexibility of making that designation under the regulations.

I was also asked about the Court of Queen's Bench decision regarding section 2, section 4(1), I think, and 4(2) and why those amendments weren't included in Bill 17. Section 2 is amended in Bill 17. The reason that sections 4(1) and 4(2) are not included is because of the amendments that are made, though, to section 2 that are included in this bill here, Mr. Speaker.

And I think this goes also to the question that the Member for St. Albert had regarding the definition of harm and why there wasn't a definition of harm included because the court had determined that that was lacking in the bill. I point out that the changes that are made, though, to section 2 in section 3 of this bill, Mr. Speaker, are that the reference to "harm to the person" is removed. The word "harm" does still exist in section 2 should these amendments pass, but the reference to "harm of one's self" is removed. It is only "harm to others," and the "harm to self" is replaced instead with, "to suffer negative effects, including substantial mental or physical deterioration," et cetera, et cetera. With those amendments we believe that the concern with the lack of a definition of self-harm is no longer required because the reference to self-harm is no longer included. As well, the concerns that the court had regarding 4(1) and 4(2) were addressed in that amendment.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will allow my hon. friends opposite to continue with their debate.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available with about 25 seconds.

Seeing none, are there any hon. members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to have the opportunity to add some comments to Bill 17, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2020. Let me see. I haven't actually gone through the whole bill, but I'm happy to see that there has been some work done and being conducted on the issue related to the mental health of Albertans.

You know, in the coming days, hopefully today or in the next few days, in the debate I would like to really bring my input and proposals based on the experience and conversations with people in my riding and my communities. With my past experience in dealing with some of the people – they have been through this sort of situation where they themselves or their family members have been patients of mental health – listening to all those stories and watching the situations very closely and being part of, in some of the cases, finding the help for people: this is something always at the top of my mind, even not really knowing that there will be a time soon when we will have the opportunity to discuss this matter in this House. I have actually mentioned the experience and the conversations and the views of my constituents on this many times when I was speaking to other bills in this House.

The problem of mental health is not only serious, I will say, but very, very prevalent. It's not, first of all, only with the patients of mental health, whether he has access to help or not. It takes so long for the mental health patient to, first of all, admit or accept that he has an illness, that he actually has a kind of problem, that he needs help. From that very first step or experience or situation, it's not only that it delays the process of getting help for the mental health patient, but also that the situation is very tricky and very difficult, very painful for the family of the mental health patient. On top of that, it makes it more painful when, in my experience, not only once or twice but in a number of cases in my community and around my family when there was a case and the actual help was not available.

It's regarding seniors that I can share the experience, it is some of those very bright, young patients who lost their lives, and it's about the students in the schools, bright students. All of a sudden everything started changing and then the families experience – I've been part of the conversation with schools and families, and the appropriate help was not available on time, I would say, in many cases. I don't exactly know how this bill is addressing these issues. That's why I said that I will take the opportunity in the next few

days to see and learn from it, how this is going to address this very serious issue.

When people have some kind of intervention, when the patient is there and kind of at a certain level admits that he needs, really, professional help, then we ended up landing at the supports or the places where those professionals are not really, actually – how would I say? – equipped in their job to deal with those unique situations or unique illnesses. That also will have a huge net impact on the health of mental health patients.

I wanted to bring this into the discussion and would like to, for the sake of having this on the record – in 2015 I just came across one event in my community on the south side when a very bright young man, you know, a mental health patient, did not realize that he was going through problems, did not share his problems with anyone in his family, anyone within his circle of friends, and he lost his life. So his close friends and the students and the University of Alberta came together. You know, they were shocked. It was painful. They could not save the life of that young fellow, so they decided: let's come together so other people will not go through the same situation. They started the event that happens in September in Mill Woods, and that event has grown extensively to thousands and thousands of people attending that event for the awareness of mental health. I would say that I see about 400 or 500 tents of stakeholders, professionals trying to bring mental health awareness to the communities. Those are some of my experiences directly related to mental health patients.

3:40

Also, the other big issue that's very close and related to mental health is the overdoses in our communities, in our province. It's huge, and it is very costly for our community. Not being a public figure, not being a public representative not that long ago, I was just an engaged, I would say, community member. I remember that I was running every single week and trying to keep up with attending the events in funeral homes where, like, our young men constantly were losing their lives due to the overdose issue, and a number of those cases are in some way related to the people suffering from mental health. If they were not, then their families were really struggling to deal with those situations, really needed help to cope with it and keep the situation under control to help the person suffering with those kind of illnesses.

Those are the experiences that were within my community, that happened on my street, and unknowingly my own kids got involved in one case, tried to help the individual but couldn't save the life of that individual. There was this public outcry in the community. I got a call from lawyers. I got a call from other professionals. They wanted me to step up and do something about it. That's the other reason I was quite happy to see that in this House we have a piece of legislation on mental health that we are discussing and we are debating, and I was so hopeful that it will help address some of those issues.

I promised my community and all those, you know, professionals – they called me, and they had lots of information to share. They already have started some work on these kind of initiatives. I will be sitting with them, and I will also be discussing. I would love to actually provide my feedback on that, and if we have any proposals. That is one of the concerns, like, not just for the sake of debate when we discuss. I tried to raise a question with the hon. minister yesterday on Bill 20 when I was talking about gender equity, diversity, and inclusion, some very serious concerns. When we see, compared to other jurisdictions, how they have achieved these goals, if I have the opportunity, I would really like to discuss these issues with other jurisdictions, how they come up with and achieve

some of these kinds of goals. I could bring the feedback to our House. I would be happy to do that.

Those were, like, serious questions. The minister probably did not have the answers right then. You know, I honestly understand. I don't have answers to everything. That was probably an honest answer he provided, but this is something kind of very serious when we do work in this House. When we debate the bills and the pieces of legislation on behalf of our constituents, on behalf of people, Albertans, we want to keep in mind how we can address the actual issues Albertans are facing.

I know the Minister of Health stood up in the House and provided some of the information on how he has involved some of the key stakeholders, but he did not really give a name and didn't really have a list of names of those key stakeholders. Just to give the benefit of the doubt, he was providing some information on that. All those grassroots people who actually are victims of these issues really being able to participate in this, then: we can have some of the voices of direct experience so we can learn from them and those voices can also be reflected in the goals or in the discussions or in the panels and we can learn from them.

That's a kind of idea that I see has constantly been missing. I'm not saying that this government's policy or direction is this. This is probably a very conventional way of doing the work in this province, but I think we need to change. We need to listen to first-hand experiences, and we need to provide a place for these very ordinary people. I actually had a chance to listen to my constituents during the election and door-knocking. I heard from a mom that lost her 19-year-old, a young man, to mental health issues.

I know this bill is a result of the court case where the judge has clearly recommended the government take some of the changes in hand and also has stipulated a timeline with it and that it has to be done within the timeline, but I'm still glad that the government actually is opening the debate on this and we're discussing this issue in the House.

Those are some of my comments on this bill. As I said, I'll be going back and looking deep into the bill and providing my further feedback on this, Mr. Speaker.

With these comments, I will move to adjourn debate on this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** All right. Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 16**  
**Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety)**  
**Amendment Act, 2020**

[Adjourned debate June 8: Mrs. Savage]

**The Acting Speaker:** Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen to debate.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move an amendment on Bill 16. I will wait for that to reach you.

3:50

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member. If you would please read this into the record.

For everybody's benefit, this amendment will be referred to as RA1.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act,

2020, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 16, Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that additional consultation with organizations providing support to victims of crime is required.

Mr. Speaker, I move this amendment because I believe that here in this province we have an incredibly strong model dealing with victims of crime. For anyone unfamiliar with the present model, a huge majority of the work done in terms of supporting victims of crime, including the work of turning up at 2 o'clock in the morning to deal with someone who has just had their life devastated, falls to volunteers. That is in a lot of ways the strength of the model because it is people who come forward and volunteer their time to help their neighbours, to support their neighbours, but those individuals are not necessarily trained professionals. They don't need to be, but what they do need is to be trained to handle those things because the things that these workers see when they volunteer with victims of crime are very, very troubling.

I mean, that's true throughout the justice system. The things that you see as a police officer, the things that you see as a court clerk, the things that you see as any participant in the justice system are very, very troubling. But in this case, we're dealing with volunteers who are giving of their time to support their neighbours because they think it's important. What they're asking for in return is that they be trained to fulfill those functions so that they're prepared to deal with the issues that are coming forward. I think that many people will be fortunate enough to have very limited interaction with the criminal justice system in their lives, so they may not be familiar with how difficult it can be to see those issues up close and to see the devastating impact that they have on the lives of those victims.

But these people, the organizations that serve the victims, the volunteers that serve the victims are very familiar with it. They're familiar with how the system works. They're familiar with what they need to do their work, so I think that consultation with them is absolutely critical. Now, the minister has said many times that he went around and consulted on this issue. Certainly, I will give him credit where credit is due. He has done a very good job of consulting on the issue of rural crime. That is work that needed to be done, so good for him, but I think we can't consult with a certain portion of the population on one specific issue and say that that's sufficient. No consultation was done with these organizations that serve victims, and they have absolutely important voices to bring to the table.

There are also victims of other types of crime. There are support groups for the families of homicide victims, at least in both Edmonton and Calgary. To the best of my knowledge they weren't consulted. There are specific support groups and, in fact, a network of support groups dealing with victims of sexual assaults. They, to the best of my knowledge, were not consulted. There are specific people working in the area of domestic violence. They were not consulted. There are police- and community-based victims associations that work throughout the province that deal with all different types of crime, and they weren't consulted.

In fact, one of the things that has happened already is that the association which serves those police-based victims' services units has lost their funding. What that does is that it impacts severely on the training that the members of the individual victims' services units get. A lot of people will think of this in terms of their own experience, and that may be Calgary or Edmonton, but the truth is that in many rural communities throughout the province where there are victims' services units, who are often located in RCMP detachments doing a lot of that work, those units are very small. It's

a very limited number of people. They run on a shoestring budget. We're talking, you know, maybe a couple hundred thousand dollars. They have maybe the ability to have sort of one full-time staffperson. Everyone else is a volunteer. What that means is that they need support with training. The fact that they're able to serve entire communities on a variety of issues in this way, I think, is absolutely amazing, and the fact that they do it on so little money is amazing.

I think that to say that these folks, who, again, are primarily volunteers stepping up to serve their neighbours, do not deserve to be consulted on a model change that impacts them directly is just wrong. I think that consultation is absolutely critical. There are a number of areas of this bill that concern me and that I think might have been done differently were consultation to have taken place with these groups.

The history of this matter is that when the NDP was in government, there was a report from the Auditor General that dealt with the fact that there was a surplus in the victims of crime fund. One of the things we had to do was run some numbers to make sure that the fund was – because you have to hold a certain surplus in case suddenly money starts coming into the fund that can see everything through for a year. So we had to determine what that amount of money was and then, based on that and based on what we expected the sort of increase over time to be on the fund, determine how to spend down the surplus in a slow and measured way so that those services would be sustainable. Some of the work we were asked to do was to determine what the needs of victims were and how best to meet them. So we had rolled out a plan, some of which had been implemented and some of which hadn't. There had been increases to the budgets of some VSU units, five of them, and they were the ones that had the greatest increase in demand without any increase in funding. But there were plans to increase the funding to many more because they needed it. They needed it desperately.

There was also a plan to implement a model similar to – in Calgary we have a fantastic group called HomeFront. They are probably one of the best agencies in the country in terms of dealing with victims of domestic violence. We wanted to extend that model to everyone in the province. There was supposed to be an agency that was set up to run to serve the rest of the province in a similar way. That agency is not going to go forward. The funding has been cut. So when the minister says that he's growing the pie, that may be true. The pie may be growing, but there are also people who are being cut off. Some of those people are those agencies, I imagine, but some of those people are the victims themselves.

Certainly, we have heard that consultation will go on on this matter. But I think my major concern is that it is already in legislation that a victim of crime is eligible only if – those are the words in the act, “only if.” Then it lists some things, some of them having to do with the old act before the Victims of Crime Act, two of them having to do with members of the class. There's a class-action settlement whereby the government hadn't applied on behalf of children in care and some of them having severe neurological damage. What that means, only if you fall into these four things, is that no one else is eligible for benefits. There are those benefits. There are death benefits. That is all that is left.

It's all very well for the government to say, “Well, we're going to go out and consult on these things,” but they'll have to come back to this House and change the legislation again in order to operationalize those things because presently those people with whom they are consulting or those people about whom they are consulting are denied by the bill which is before this House.

I think that that's a really good reason to go back and consult with these units. In fact, we've heard from volunteers or members of

these victims' services units who attempted to attend the consultation that the minister was doing and who were denied access because they worked for victims' services units, and I think that that is a big concern because it suggests that the consultation was actually seeking a specific response.

4:00

Now, that isn't to say that some of the moves the minister made haven't been necessary. Certainly, I applaud his move on drug treatment court. I think that that is an amazing move. What I don't think is that we should pay for that out of the pockets of victims of crime because what we're saying is that this money, which previously had to go to victims, will now instead go to treat those who potentially victimized them. Now, I'm not saying that those people don't deserve treatment. They're absolutely worthy of treatment. They absolutely should get the help that they need. But to say to victims, “You can't have money because we need to use it on the people who victimized you” I think is a bit harsh and I actually don't think at all necessary.

That is the reason why I think we need to send this back for more conversation. Certainly, I have dealt with this file. I had a plan for this file moving forward that involved spending more of this money on victims. That being said, I'm not necessarily the expert. The experts are the people who have lived this and breathed this and work this day in and day out, so they should be consulted. I think that that's a fair request.

The things that the minister intends to do with the money, for the most part, are good. Certainly, ALERT was running at a deficit position, spending down its surplus, so this investment was needed – that's true – but I think this division we're seeing, where you can only spend money on enforcement or you can spend money on support services, is a false distinction because those two things go hand in hand. We know that the more supports we're able to provide to people, the less enforcement we require. I don't think that we can say to a victim of crime: look, there just isn't enough for you. I mean, certainly, it's fine for the minister to say, “Well, it's better to have more enforcement, and then we won't have as many victims,” but I don't think that's helpful to the people who are victims currently.

You know, I've heard from people who have incredible stories of what they were able to do with the money they received. They were able to pay for counselling. They were able to cover the fact that they couldn't go to work. Some of these victims are victims of horrific crimes. Some of them have been beaten badly. Some of them have been sexually assaulted. It's very challenging to just move on with your life after that. Sometimes people need to take a little time off work to heal. Sometimes people need a little bit of counselling in order to get through that. Certainly, victims' services provides some of that support, but they definitely don't have the capacity to be a counselling service for every victim of crime sort of going forward into the future. That small amount of money that these victims received out of the victims of crime fund went a long way for a lot of them, and I think that seeing that disappear is really, really sad. I'm concerned about moves being made around the victims of crime fund because I actually think that this is one of the fundamental things that the justice system is going to have to grapple with.

I have said this before. In truth, victims of crime don't technically exist in the courtroom. The people present are the Crown on behalf of we the people, the defence or the accused, and the judge, but the decisions that are made have massive impacts on victims of crime. From what I've heard over the last five years, those impacts are not generally positive. I've heard from some people who have had some horrific experiences, who have lost loved ones and felt that the



treatment they received was wildly inadequate. So I think this is not the time to take support away from those victims. I think the justice system needs to be grappling with how it is treating those victims and how it understands the impact on their lives, because I've rarely heard from anyone who didn't find that the process did not meet their expectations.

With that I will . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate on amendment RA1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available – my apologies – on this amendment RA1. Are there any takers for five minutes of questions or comments? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

**Ms Renaud:** I would just offer some additional time to my colleague. I would like to hear a little bit more about her experiences hearing from the number of people I'm sure she's consulted with or she's spoken to about these important issues.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much. I guess what I was saying is that one of the reasons I think these victim-serving organizations need to be consulted is because they deal with victims every day. Most people, in my experience, when they become the victim of a crime or when a loved one of theirs is a victim of a homicide or a loved one of theirs is a victim of any crime, they are very surprised by the process they meet when they enter the court system and not usually pleasantly so.

You know, we talk often about Jordan because it's had a huge impact on our criminal justice system. We talk about the delays and the impact the delays have on the lives of the accused person who is awaiting trial because their life is on hold, but that doesn't just impact the accused person. It often impacts a victim and the family of a victim while they wait for a trial. It is important. It is, in my view, critically important to protect the rights of those who are accused of a crime because they are accused and not convicted and because we have convicted people wrongfully in the past. But it is also important to ensure that we are protecting victims. I think that everything in our system impacts them, and every time we talk about delay, we have to consider that that impacts them, too.

Often I have spoken to people who have been unable to heal from the trauma they experienced, whether through what they experienced directly or whether through the loss of a loved one, because they feel like their life is stuck in this holding pattern while they await the outcome of the matter. They feel like they can't move on, they can't grieve, and they can't heal because it just comes up over and over and over again with different appearances in court. That's really, really hard on people. So taking away funding that they may receive directly, taking away funding to support them: I think that's really challenging. The intention behind the fund was to spend that money on victims, and I think we should. I think that even if we increased the amount of the fund payable, we could still spend that on victims and still not be adequately meeting those needs yet.

Now, I'm not saying that those other things aren't important. What I'm saying is that those are core government services. They could have been paid for by not giving billions away to profitable

corporations. We shouldn't create this sense of scarcity by giving money away to those who are already rich and then saying: police and victims, you can fight it out; only one of you gets. I don't think that's appropriate at all. I think that if more consultation had been done, if appropriate consultation had been done with these organizations that serve these victims, more of that might have been heard, that more of that would have come forward and been considered. Saying to someone who has lost a child that there will be more police who may prevent someone else from losing their child is not necessarily a lot of comfort, not at a time when they're asking for support for themselves, not at a time when they feel like they're being dragged through a lengthy trial process that is difficult for them to understand without legal counsel.

**4:10**

So I think that the reason the Legislature ought to delay moving this bill forward is for exactly that reason, so that we can hear from those voices which are often absent from the consideration of the criminal justice system when it's done by lawyers; not that I'm saying that lawyers aren't very important participants in the criminal justice system, just that we must speak to others as well.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to join debate? The individual who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've gotten up a couple of times to speak on this bill, on referring it to committee and then, now, again on this particular amendment to also have continued consultation specifically with nonprofit organizations, community organizations. Who I believe would be especially important are police-based services that actually focus on nonprofit organizations with victims' services units.

Again I reiterate that in this House I've asked the minister repeatedly several questions in regard to this piece of legislation. I just want to highlight the fact that it seems to me that the minister and the government clearly did not do enough consultation on this particular aspect of this proposed piece of legislation, and for that reason I think that it would be pertinent for the government to actually refer this back and provide these nonprofit organizations this opportunity to really provide more feedback.

You know, the minister to some extent states that there has been consultation on this, but we don't know who the government actually consulted with or why they decided to consult with these particular groups and individuals. We don't have any information on that or when it was actually done. We don't know what the government actually learned from any consultation that it did do, if any at all, and whether the feedback is actually provided within this bill.

Now, as was stated by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who actually put the amendment forward, it's not that we are against what the piece of legislation is actually attempting to do. We understand the importance of what it is trying to do. The problem that many of us in the opposition have is the fact that they're actually taking money out of the victims of crime fund to do what they want to do. Of course, I've talked at length about the actual benefits that the victims of crime fund was providing through nonprofit organizations, community groups, indigenous and tribal communities as well as municipalities and other nonprofit organizations specifically with victims' services units. These benefits were focused on individuals that experienced violent crimes, specifically, you know, any physical damage, emotional harm, property damage, or any economic loss as a result of the crime.

I believe that it's absolutely important that we provide this opportunity for these stakeholders, specifically to actually provide additional information because what we're seeing is that what is inevitably going to happen here is an adverse effect. This is the real problem here, the fact that these people aren't going to be able to access the services that they really need because of the experience that they've had. I would even endeavour to say that this is irresponsible of the government. It's actually irresponsible of the government that they're going to be taking money out of the victims of crime fund that is actually going to be helping the people who've actually experienced these crimes, that are victims of these crimes.

Of course, we know that people who have gone through this experience are traumatically affected. We do know, through studies of what happened to people who experienced these types of crimes, that this trauma stays with them for a very long time. Then, of course, if they don't get the supports that they desperately need, it could lead them down a path that will actually inhibit them in terms of their quality of life. It could drastically affect them. We know that there is a high risk of people who experience trauma to actually become addicted to alcohol and drugs.

Without having the proper benefits and supports through the nonprofit organizations that actually focus on helping these survivors of these, you know, sometimes very horrendous crimes – I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud or the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or perhaps both of them that were speaking to this at one point or another, the fact that children experience these horrendous crimes happening. Imagine the kind of effect, the trauma that would actually be experienced by these children who experience a violent crime, which is often, in domestic violence situations, one parent over the other, and how that would incredibly affect those children and the supports that they're desperately going to need in those kinds of circumstances.

As I state, while we agree with what the government is trying to do in terms of providing additional funds to ALERT, RAPID force, of course, drug treatment courts, and hiring more Crown prosecutors, we ask: why does it need to be done at the expense of taking money out of the victims of crime fund, which will actually help people that are actually going through this type of trauma? As I stated, I would categorize this as incredibly irresponsible of the government because it's going to create a void where people who actually need the help aren't going to be able to get it.

You know, we've heard the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General get up in this House several times and talk about, specifically, rural communities and the fact that people experience these kinds of crimes and that they are indeed traumatically affected. So we can't understand why, then, you would take money out of the victims of crime fund to do this. What's drastically needed here is for members of this cabinet, and specifically the Minister of Justice, to actually hear out these nonprofit organizations, other community groups, indigenous communities when it comes to this specific issue. I think and we highly believe that this cannot go underfunded.

4:20

This is an incredibly important priority. The government should be looking elsewhere to find where they can take money from. I would even endeavour to say that, okay, you know, we know that you've given money to corporations. The question is: okay; well, how much is actually going to be taken out of the victims of crime fund? How much money is actually going to be taken out of there so that they can then put it into ALERT, RAPID force, drug treatment courts, and hiring more Crown prosecutors?

I want to encourage the government. Perhaps they just don't realize the importance of the programs that are being offered by

these nonprofit organizations. They actually desperately need the financial support so that they can provide supports to the individuals that have experienced these horrendous crimes, especially children. Especially children. It's for this reason that I want to highly encourage all members of this House to support this particular amendment that was put forward by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

I also wanted to highlight just some additional background on this. The October Budget 2019 forecast the reduction of the fund's expenditures from \$43 million to \$28 million by 2021. What we see is that this government has already started underfunding this particular program. I just don't understand why the minister hasn't been able to get up in this House and talk to the particular questions that we've been asking in terms of this bill.

God forbid that any one of us should actually have to experience something like this. I haven't experienced anything like this first-hand, but I can tell you that through what I've heard from constituents who've actually experienced it is that it's trauma that ends up affecting them for their entire lives. If they don't get the necessary supports, they end up being severely, severely affected. If they don't have the supports, then it could be actually crippling where it would affect them in terms of their daily life, it would impact whether they go to work on a daily basis, all of these things. It's so important that we give these nonprofit organizations the opportunity to actually – or that they be appropriately consulted. That's what we're really talking about here.

Again, I stress the fact that we don't know anything – we don't know anything – about how the government consulted on this particular bill. We don't know who the government consulted with, when they consulted with them, what they learned from those consultations, and if any of that is actually reflected in this bill. I think it's really important that we give an opportunity for the government to actually hear from these nonprofit organizations.

You know, being from Edmonton-Ellerslie – and I always bring this up, the fact that it's also important to provide culturally appropriate supports. This is something that perhaps the government hasn't considered, right? Like, people from different ethnic backgrounds and specifically religious backgrounds are going to experience things in a different way and understand them in a different way because, of course, they come from a different life philosophy.

I give you the example of – not particularly related to this, but it's just an opportunity to kind of just highlight how people coming from a different religious background will actually experience trauma. I remember – it was probably about a good three years ago now – that a constituent from the Sikh community came to my office because his mother was actually passing away in the hospital. Basically, his mother was nonresponsive, and the doctors had the mother on life support and basically were just waiting for the mother to pass away. But, of course, to the family, within their own religious philosophy, this was just not acceptable. I mean, I think that for all people you'd want to make sure that people will fight until the bitter end, as they say, but specifically I know that in the Sikh religion you just don't give up on life. I remember having, you know, very – well, I could tell that this individual and his family were just traumatized by this whole experience.

So it's really important that . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I couldn't help notice that my esteemed colleague was in the middle of a

sentence. He always tells such interesting stories that relate back to the issue at hand, so if he could be so kind to finish that off, I would be grateful.

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

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the opportunity to finish. Of course, as I was stating, the family was traumatized by this entire experience.

Now, if we were to apply that same understanding and the knowledge that we gain from this experience to the victims of crime fund and how it's really important that we give nonprofits an opportunity to actually relate the experiences that they've had – you know, I'm sure that they deal with a great number of people from different ethnic backgrounds, religious backgrounds and how they would approach providing people with the supports and assistance that have experienced this type of horrendous crime would also be a factor. We don't know because, of course, as I stated, the minister has not provided any of these kinds of details on who they have consulted with, if at all, with nonprofit organizations and community groups and who's actually going to be missing out when the supports are no longer going to be there.

Now, in speaking to a previous amendment last night, I was talking about the fact that, you know, these nonprofit organizations often exactly help out people from different ethnic backgrounds and that the Alberta of today looks very different than the Alberta of 50 years ago. I was speaking specifically, Mr. Speaker, about the fact that we have a much higher population of people from diverse backgrounds, right? Moving forward into a more modern Alberta, we need to make sure that nonprofit organizations are given the supports so that they can help people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and diverse religious backgrounds and that that expertise is actually supporting. By taking money out of the victims of crime fund and the actual supports for these nonprofit groups and additional community groups, we're putting at risk the actual supports that can be provided.

My fear is that because we actually have no information on who the minister or staff actually consulted with, we don't know the reality. This is why it's so important that we actually take an opportunity to get this bill right and actually provide nonprofit organizations and community groups the opportunity to actually provide this feedback. I don't think it's too much to ask.

4:30

I think that especially because – you know, I discussed this last night, when we were speaking specifically to the ethnic makeup of Alberta. In the next 10 years we know – it's forecasted – that people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Alberta will actually grow to be 50 per cent of the population. Alberta is going to look very different in another 10 years than it actually does right now or how it did 50 years ago. I think that it's important, especially as a member from a diverse religious background – we have many here in the House – that we be able to provide supports to Albertans, specifically from these diverse religious backgrounds.

I have a good friend in the Muslim community. He's the outreach imam for Al Rashid mosque and is actually a social worker, Brother Sadique Pathan, a wonderful member of the community.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate on RA1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, of course.

**Mr. Carson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to the amendment before us, that Bill 16, I believe – I don't have it in front of me – shall not be read a second time at this time,

recognizing, as many of my colleagues in the NDP caucus have, that there are major flaws in this legislation.

You know, looking back at some of the news reports that have come out since the introduction of this legislation and since this conversation has started, I believe I commented on the CBC article in my previous speech, but I think it's very relevant and it bears repeating. On May 28 the CBC reported that the UCP government planned to get rid of its current injury benefit as well as the witness to homicide benefit, a one-time payment of \$5,000 to people who witness the killing of a loved one. I think it's important that we take a moment to reflect on that statement, that we're going to actively be taking benefits away from people who have witnessed horrendous crimes, crimes that will most definitely impact them and potentially change their lives for the worse for the rest of their lives. We have a government, a UCP government, telling us that Bill 16 is about strengthening the ability to get resources to victims of crime, but in the other breath they're saying quite plainly that they're pausing these benefits and that at this time they're removing these benefits.

The article goes on further to say that, instead, financial benefits to victims of crime have been narrowed to people who have experienced severe crimes. Narrowed, Mr. Speaker. So once again we have the government saying that Bill 16 is strengthening the ability to get these funds to victims of crime, but on the other hand, in their discussions with the media and with the public, they're actually explaining the truth, that they're narrowing the ability for this money to be sent out to people.

The minister went on to say that we're pulling back these funds a little bit in the interim until we get feedback from the two MLAs who are going to be on this panel to come up with a new model for the victims of crime fund. While I appreciate that there is need for movement on this issue, you know, while the victims of crime fund has served our province, I would argue, quite well for several decades, I think we can always aim to do better. I truly hope that that's what this government is moving on doing, but the problem is that in the meantime these people are left with nothing. So I don't understand how we're expected to vote in support of this Bill 16 and say, "Yeah, you can pause these benefits for victims of crime, and hopefully you'll come up with something better in the future." Now, once again, I support the idea of strengthening this fund, but what we've seen and what we've heard from this minister, which is very little, has not given us any confidence that we are moving in the right direction.

I think back to a conversation, a meeting I had with a constituent who came into my office, and they were advocating for somebody else in their community because they had been the victim of a collision that left them with life-changing disabilities. They were advocating to me that considering that it was a drunk driver that did this to them, they should be included in the victims of crime fund, which, as the Alberta government website states, is not the case in many instances. This person was advocating to me because the person who was injured was not in a position to advocate on their own behalf. That is one of my biggest worries about any changes to the victims of crime fund, that we are going to negatively impact these people who are not able to advocate on their own behalf.

When we look at some of the reasons that Albertans are able to access the victims of crime fund, whether it be damage or destruction or loss of property, bodily or psychological harm, lost wages because of injuries, whether psychological or physical, funding for services like counselling or psychologists, expenses incurred in moving out of offenders' houses – somebody that's been victimized by, potentially, a domestic partner needs funds, and they need reassurances from the government that they will be protected if they try to make this transition. But once again we have this

minister saying: "There are no more funds in certain instances for these people to gain access to these programs. Trust us; we'll deal with it on the back end, and it will all be okay." Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that does not work for the people who have been victimized across our province.

Now, there have been many articles, like I said, from advocates across many industries and one in particular that I see. Alf Rudd has been very outspoken on this issue, a person who has over five decades of law enforcement experience with the RCMP, Taber police, the Blood Tribe police, and is currently the president of the Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association. He calls this a ploy to raid the fund and goes on to explain that the surpluses, specifically, in this fund could disappear very quickly if the minister decides that the best use for the surplus is to go specifically to policing or to prosecution.

I recognize the importance of ensuring proper funding. Especially when we look at rural communities, we have these conversations about wait times for communities outside of urban centres, and I appreciate that more needs to be done, but what we've heard from this minister is little more than lip service, Mr. Speaker. What we've heard from this minister is announcements of extra policing going to I believe the number was 500 extra RCMP on the streets of rural communities, but he didn't include any extra funding. The extra funding he included was to actually take more resources from those communities and resell it to them as if it was some new funding. So that is a massive concern for me.

The conversation that we should be having instead of talking about narrowing what these funds are for or pausing the witness to crime benefit is how we can expand these funds to communities, once again recognizing that rural communities are especially affected in wait times and services for their communities. Why aren't we talking about ensuring extra funding, extra education, whether it be for the community, whether it be for the policing services, and, most importantly, for the victims of these crimes themselves? Crime is high in these communities, which means that payouts and services for these victims should go hand in hand with that. Why aren't we talking about ensuring that we are expanding the scope of the victims of crime fund? While I appreciate that the minister may or may not come back to say, "That's what we are doing," the problem is that we have not seen that. It's not included in this legislation specifically what the minister plans to do with this funding.

**4:40**

I spoke, to some extent, about some of the other nonprofits that are going to be affected by changes here or that at least are concerned about changes. On May 25 these organizations wrote to the Premier: the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. You know, in my last speech I also spoke of I believe it was the John Humphrey centre. I'll take a moment to confirm that.

These organizations are very concerned about their funding because now not only is the minister having a conversation about changes to the funding of these organizations, that may have accessed supports through the victims of crime fund to ensure that these victims are getting the supports they need, but they've also had their funding cut on the other end, whether they're accessing community-based grants through this government, something that we've seen decimated with very little consultation – I would say there was absolutely no consultation, especially when we look at the problem of us not having the opportunity to question this government as much as we should have been able to on the undemocratic moves that this government has made in limiting our

ability to question them on their budget through the estimates process, which was essentially eliminated entirely.

I would like to take at face value that this minister is going to expand this fund to ensure more victims of crime are being supported through this program, but we haven't heard that from this minister. We've really heard very little. You know, from what I can see, there hasn't been a response made to these organizations to provide reassurances that their funding wouldn't be affected, but this seems to be a pattern from this government. They change the way that funding is given out, whether it be the changes to the lottery fund, moved to general revenue, whether it be the massive cuts to CIP and CFEP across the province, incredibly important funds for education and infrastructure and, really, the community well-being across the province.

These programs have been decimated by this government and with very little transparency at all, to move those lottery funds to general revenue, to talk about moving victims of crime funding to fund this or that without any reassurances or any proof that it's actually going to be spent on programs that they said that they will be spent on. I'm really not sure how we're supposed to take that and just support it.

That is why, once again, I'm supporting this amendment that's before us. I think it is in all of our best interests to take some more time to reflect on the importance of this fund, to reflect on the ability to expand this fund to ensure that the money is actually making it to the victims of these crimes, the people who need this money most. But that has not been the conversation coming from this UCP government.

With everything that has been going on across North America and across the world, there have been increased calls for transparency in how funding for police and services that wrap around police is being spent. People are asking for more transparency, and this is not a move in the right direction to ensure that that transparency is there.

Now, I really hope that the minister will take some time this evening or very shortly to explain what he really has in mind for these funds, because we have not gotten any explanation up to this point, and many of the people on this side of the House, in the NDP caucus, have raised that important point, that we're being asked to vote on a piece of legislation that has had very little response from the Justice minister. It's simply not okay. It's not okay that we be expected to vote on this with very little conversation.

You, know, I think about the people, whether it be that person that walked into my constituency office or the people across our province that have been victimized, and I'm not sure how I'm supposed to go and tell them, like the Justice minister did: "Sorry. There's no funding there for you because we narrowed the scope of the fund, because we paused the fund until we come up with answers. We don't have any answers right now, but hopefully one day we will, and hopefully one day you'll get the funding that you deserve for being victimized."

I can only imagine that those same constituents and people across Alberta will be revictimized because their government was not willing to ensure that the funding was there for them. Instead, they have a UCP government that says that with the massive surplus that is there, that should be reinvested into the victims of crime fund, we need to ensure sustainability. Really, what we've seen, whether it be cuts to health care or 20,000 layoffs in education, is that sustainability to this government means that no one gets anything and that there'll be money left over on the budget bottom line at the end of the day. But people need this money today. They don't need to wait for the review to come back and hope that there's money there for them.

It really is a pattern, Mr. Speaker, that we're seeing from this government, and it's very frustrating. It's frustrating to have to go back to my community and not have the answers for them. I truly don't understand how some of these UCP MLAs are able to go back to their communities, whether it be, you know, about proposed cuts to HALO funding or proposed cuts to education in their communities or hospitals and health care and the loss of doctors, and say: "I did my best, but really, you know, with this Premier, it wasn't in the cards. So now we're going to lose physicians in our communities. Now we're going to lose hospitals. Now we're going to lose victims of crime funding in our communities." I truly don't know how members can go back and reconcile that fact with their community and with themselves.

I was put here for a second term to continue to fight for strengthening the programs that are offered by government, not for weakening them. That is something that I take to heart every single day. You know, you don't always get it right, but you should do your best to do that, and unfortunately this UCP government has gotten it wrong more times than they've gotten it right.

Once again, I hope that everyone will take the time to consider this very reasonable amendment. I think it's the right thing to do in the current context of the backlash that we've been hearing from organizations that receive funds through the victims of crime fund, the experienced people . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Williams:** Okay. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was struck by the speech, a few different moments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday brought up concern about a pattern of history within our government. I want to take a 30,000-foot view of a pattern of action from the opposition members during second reading. I'm wondering if they paid attention during their introduction to the legislative process. The Member for Edmonton-West Henday sort of referenced that he was re-elected in 2015.

Second reading, Mr. Speaker, as we all know in this House or ought to, is the reading where we analyze in principle whether or not the legislation is something we support. We have a process. In Alberta we use the Committee of the Whole. Other Legislatures use other processes through committees to amend in detail. I'm very excited when in second reading, in these debates on amendments or in the debate itself on second reading on all sorts of legislation, and I hear the members opposite get up and say: "I support choice in education. I support helping, you know, find efficiencies in program X or Y. I support finding innovations to better serve our constituents and victims of crime, but I just don't know if I like this comma here or that detail there."

Mr. Speaker, we're very lucky to have the legislative process handed down to us, from centuries upon centuries of work, from our ancestors here in Alberta, here in Canada, and before that across the ocean in the United Kingdom. In that process it is in Committee of the Whole, or in committee in whatever Legislature it happens to be, where we're allowed to make these amendments. I'm very excited to see that the member supports. I can only imagine, after we rightfully correct this wrong and defeat this proposed amendment, that the members opposite, including the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, because he supports in principle the intentions of the minister but just isn't sure that there is enough detail in the legislation, will propose substantive amendments in Committee of the Whole and vote for the legislation in second reading.

It's going to be terrific to see a sense of bipartisanship in the Legislature, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud mentioned often early on in her term, since being elected in 2019 – maybe she's forgotten some since then – and I'm hoping this bipartisanship will continue. I'm looking forward to that vote together in support.

One of a few other moments in the speech that I'd like to highlight is the concern that they have. Mr. Speaker, the conversation that we should be having, says the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, is to expand these funds to more communities. Well, I believe that what we're doing is expanding it because there's not one community member, no matter what their religious or ethnic affiliation might be, that does not benefit from the prevention of crime, the expansion of the RAPID and ALERT systems, and the ability of us to fund them. In my community I can tell you that whether they be a member of the Sikh, the Christian, Muslim, or any other faith in my constituency, in rural Alberta they all suffer, regardless of their religious affiliation, from the scourge of rural crime, that has been mounting.

4:50

It's a wall slowly moving north, Mr. Speaker. A few years ago in Manning you would not have found the kind of crime you find now. In a few years more we'll see it in High Level and La Crête on the northern edge. This scourge continues to push. It does not matter whether you're on a reserve or off, and it doesn't matter what your ethnic affiliation is. They don't want rural crime, and that is why one of the best possible things we can do for victims is to prevent them from becoming victims.

When I speak to victims in my constituency or to family or friends of mine who have been victims of crime, rural or otherwise, urban or in the more far-flung northern communities of our province, they all agree with me, and they say: "Of course I'd rather not have been a victim. I'd much rather that we had a response that could prevent and deter these sorts of situations from happening." They're not small instances, Mr. Speaker. Some of them are small, petty crime, which, obviously, is regrettable, but as we heard from the Member for Grande Prairie in her member's statement last week, there are tragedies, absolute human tragedies, that happen. We cannot write that off. If we can prevent even one of those instances from happening in my community, I'm in. I'm in 110 per cent. I'm in every day of the week, seven days from Sunday.

This is what I'm hoping we can see from the members opposite, that bipartisanship, collaboration, that we can work together on this issue. Here in second reading we're looking at: is the intent of this the right direction? Is the intent of this right? It seems to me that the speakers continue to try and walk both sides of the fence, Mr. Speaker. They say: I like the idea of trying to prevent crime, I like the idea of supporting ALERT, I like the idea of supporting RAPID, but I'm just not sure I want to do it right now. I'm concerned about that.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. members, are there any . . . [interjections] Order. Order. [interjection] Hon. Member for St. Albert, order.

Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to RA1? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak to the reasoned amendment on Bill 16, the Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020. I'm going to begin some of my comments with an e-mail I just got from a constituent, I think, yesterday.

Dear Ms . . .

I won't say my name.

I am writing with regard to a news item I saw today about the UCP taking some funds reserved for Victim Services and putting those towards policing.

I have a personal bone to pick. I was once given access to a Victim Services counsellor after a traumatizing event in my life where RCMP needed to be called, and she really helped me. I do not know where I would be today if I hadn't had access to that service. I truly may not have entered grad school and subsequently earned my Masters and PhD. The repercussions of removed Victim Services funding could be far reaching and terrible.

I am horrified to read this news, and [I] want to register my fury.

That is from a person who has just moved to Lethbridge from Calgary. Yeah, welcome to Lethbridge. You write an e-mail, and you get it read into the record in the Legislature.

I mean, this is the sort of thing, though, Mr. Speaker, that this government has not provided any reasonable answers on: what kinds of services are going to be provided as a result of these changes to the disbursement of victims of crime funds? There hasn't been a demonstrated record of consultation with the community, and that is why my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View has proposed a reasoned amendment on this piece of legislation.

Furthermore, we don't know, Mr. Speaker, the actual effect of the changes to the financial benefits on victims because a number of the injury compensations have been removed. Many of the injury benefits, that were based on injury type, have been proposed to be removed by this piece of legislation. It used to be that, for example, if you were a kid in care and you were sexually assaulted by your foster parent, you could apply to the victims of crime fund for restitution, a financial benefit for the fact that you suffered a crime when you were in the care of the state. These are kids who oftentimes don't have any extended family to help them through, don't have any of the other social supports. That money meant something and means something to this day for all of those kids in care that have suffered at the hands of their foster parents, and there are too many of them to count.

So when you remove that financial benefit and you say instead, "Well, here are four counselling sessions for your trouble," no, that doesn't reflect my values. I do think we need a reasoned amendment, and we do need to send this bill back to the drawing board. It is absolutely unacceptable that we would be pulling the rug out from underneath victims in that way.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I note that there have in fact been a number of lawsuits around this matter and, in particular, around kids in care who have not had access to the victims of crime compensation fund. In fact, there was a class-action lawsuit that wound its way through in 2015. It was a little bit, I think, messy and unclear as to the kind of justice that those children in care, now adults, actually had access to as they were victimized serially in foster care by their foster parents. Some of them got between \$15,000 and \$30,000. I'll just read you a quote about the kind of treatment that Marty, a fellow who lives on Elizabeth Métis settlement near Cold Lake, had. Marty and his younger brother grew up in care, wards of the province for seven years. Here's a quote from 2015: I lived in 36 different foster homes and group homes; I was sexually molested; I was beaten; I still suffer from childhood posttraumatic stress disorder. That class-action lawsuit was around the government's refusal to apply to the victims of crime fund for the benefits that those now adults were entitled to.

If we're going to start cutting off those kinds of financial benefits for people who have suffered, then we can look forward to more lawsuits, more suffering, more intergenerational trauma. Completely unnecessary, Mr. Speaker. Completely and entirely unnecessary.

What we need this bill to do is make sure that those financial benefits are commensurate, that they are proportional to the harm that was done by the perpetrator of the crime, that they accurately follow the person's actual needs over the course of their lives, that they allow that person to turn the page on their victimization. Four counselling sessions doesn't cut it. If you get beat up by your husband for 20 years and you finally have to leave and you don't have any money of your own, it doesn't cut it. We need to have proper financial benefits for injury. People pay into that victims of crime fund. Those benefits should be going to victims.

Now, there is no doubt that there are some communities that do not have adequate law enforcement coverage, particularly rural communities – there's no doubt about this – and there is no doubt that, in particular, for some communities we have seen response times and so on and investigation timelines go on too long in those cases. That is why some of those targeted investments, via the co-operation with the RCMP that we undertook between 2017 and 2019, resulted in the reduction of a number of different types of crime. They were targeted investments in law enforcement to solve specific problems, both for getting rid of the bad guys and the serial offenders but also keeping communities safe in a preventative way.

These things are not mutually exclusive, and with the fact that this government has set them up as mutually exclusive, that you can either have law enforcement or you can compensate people who are sexually molested in care, that's not a choice. That doesn't reflect anyone's values. I'm not sure why we're having this conversation, and that's why we have to set it up to send this bill to a reasoned amendment. Now, this idea that we're going to just wait for the financial benefit schedule from some period of time later on: that is pretty cold comfort. If you are a witness to a homicide right now, you've just lost your \$5,000 benefit as a result of what's being proposed here.

5:00

That is pretty cold comfort to a sexual assault victim, Mr. Speaker, to even a serious break-and-enter robbery and injury that is sustained as a result of that crime. People deserve to be compensated, and that is why we have the victims of crime fund in the first place, but that is also to make sure that we are both compensating people on the one side but also adequately supporting them.

That's why we need to talk to the victims' services organizations. I have met with mine in Lethbridge – it sort of serves the whole corridor – many, many times over the last five years. An amazing group of volunteers sustains those services, and they accompany law enforcement to some of the most difficult situations that human beings ever face, where we have violence, where we have trauma, where we have both the worst of humanity in terms of people being victimized, and their job is to bring out the best in terms of our resilience and our recovery and our plan to find justice in a system where, hopefully, they will find that justice in the courtroom, Mr. Speaker.

This idea that we're going to just completely do a rewrite on how those organizations are funded without even talking to them and setting their needs and their long-term sustainability for funding and development of new programs, perhaps in rural areas or in indigenous areas or in places where we have certain groups of folks who need specific linguistic services, whatever the case may be as those needs change over time, the fact that we're just going to yank a bunch of money away and say, "Yeah, we might have a plan later, but we don't have a plan now; don't worry; you're not going to get any funding if something bad happens to you because we've just taken away all of the injury benefits; here's some counselling; talk to you later": that is not at all consistent with a victim-centric

approach in our system that actually turns a victim into a survivor and recasts that person's experience in a way that they can go back out into the world with strength after so much has been taken away from them.

That's the job of the victims' services volunteers, both in the first instance and in those moments where everything is so crucial, where that trauma is happening right there and then, but also in the months after, in the years after. This notion that we're just going to rewrite the programs without any conversation at all with these volunteers that do this, with people who have gone through these systems and who have told us, "Yes, this worked, but this didn't; do this, but don't do that": that's the kind of work that should be going into this bill.

If we actually want to be tough on crime, we need to be soft on victims, and we need to be soft on the kinds of things that bring us together. Resilience is not something that comes – you don't get that through an iron fist in a courtroom. You get that through a social services response. You get that through actual healing and compassion and counselling and, actually, yes, access to funds to rebuild your life.

So, Mr. Speaker, this bill should be subjected to a reasoned amendment as proposed by my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. There's another reason it ought to be so as well, and that is that there is a long history of conversations with victims' services organizations, with municipalities, with other organizations such as sexual assault centres, such as immigrant-serving agencies, such as the Child and Youth Advocate, for example. There are all kinds of organizations that are both in the nonprofit sector but also attached in some way to some level of government, whether it be the provincial government, municipal, or some of the values that were articulated in the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights Act, that is in effect at the federal level. Those conversations had been had, and they had been had by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, so it is not as if this is new territory.

There is no question that there was a surplus building up in the victims of crime fund. The Auditor General found this. This is not news to anyone. The question is: what do you do with it? Do you use those funds that are paid as restitution by people who are convicted of an offence? They've paid their debt, and they have to pay a fine, too. They do that because we have – as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View says, the victim is not necessarily in the courtroom. This is a recognition that the victim is an important part of that justice system, and it has been historically a blind spot of our justice system. The Crown seeks the justice, but the victim doesn't always feel it.

The other set of questions I would have around this is: how does this affect indigenous justice systems? How does this affect the funding? This is just a set of open-ended questions and something that I would like to see come out during consultation because I certainly haven't seen the Justice minister talk about it. How does this affect sentencing circles and the community response to crime? Again, it is a different world view in an indigenous justice system. We see it in effect in many communities, where that actual reckoning with the contravention that the perpetrator does is with the victim in that room or the victim's family or whatever the case may be – it can take different forms – in a sentencing circle and in a real process of restitution and paying back one's debt to one's community. How do these reductions in victims' services funding – because they are reductions in favour of other uses of the fund. How are those programs affected? Has anyone, you know, even asked the question? I'm asking the question now, and it forms the basis of the case for proceeding with a reasoned amendment, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member. I will remind the hon. member to table the e-mail that she referred to at her earliest opportunity.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody be looking to partake.

Seeing none, are there any hon. members wishing to speak to amendment RA1? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has risen.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this referral amendment, that Bill 16 "be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that additional consultation with organizations providing support to victims of crime is required." It's an important amendment. I think I ought to remind the government that when they used to sit here, they would focus on consultations and how consultations are important to get things right, and here we have a good case for consultations as well.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The president of a leading group that represents Alberta's 73 victims' services organizations, 73 organizations from across Alberta, is saying that they were not consulted about it. That's unfair, and that's the government doing something without any consultation whatsoever with those who are on the ground, who are providing these important services, who are supporting victims, who are supporting communities – indigenous communities, racialized communities – for over two decades. The government is completely ignoring that group and moving ahead with changes that nobody was asking for.

5:10

The only reason that they are doing these changes is that in their budgets they imposed deep and reckless cuts on policing and municipalities. Now they see a pot of money, and they are taking that to pay for their cuts.

I am totally in favour of the government supporting the Alberta law enforcement response team, ALERT. I'm in favour of the government hiring more prosecutors, 50 Crown prosecutors, I think. Ever since this government came into power, I have been hearing about those 50 prosecutors and an invitation to come to Rocky Mountain House but didn't see anything concrete until now. I support funding for RAPID force to tackle rural crime.

Providing safety and security for Albertans: that's the fundamental obligation of any government. That's the responsibility of this government, but in so doing, they shouldn't be taking money from the victims of crime. They were wronged as well, and since they were wronged, it's the government's responsibility to also provide them supports so they can heal. That's also the government's fundamental responsibility. It's not appropriate for the government to take money from this fund to pay for their cuts.

Those organizations are even using words like: the government is – and I quote – raiding the victims' services fund. The president, Mr. Rudd, is pleading with this government to put a stop to it; let's have conversations. But this government has earplugs in their ears and is not willing to listen.

Now we learn that the government is setting up a working group, co-chaired by two government MLAs, to do consultations on a new victim assistance model. I think that, in the first place, nobody was asking for this new model. It's just this government creating some work for their own MLAs. Now, if they have set it up, why not, then, hear from all these organizations who are speaking against this bill? If this amendment is accepted, I think this will put a brake on it for now and will give these working group co-chairs an opportunity to reach out to these organizations and actually listen

to the folks on the ground, actually hear from those who have been serving victims for the last two decades.

There are many other concerns that have been raised. Defence lawyers have raised concerns on accessibility, affordability of justice, and supports for legal aid. The government didn't do anything about that. Well, I'm proud to be part of the government that revamped legal aid and put additional resources into legal aid to make sure that those who are victims, those who are less fortunate among us have resources to access justice.

Similarly, Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, a group that manages, represents all women's shelters across this province and provides critical supports to those who are surviving domestic violence and supports to their children, their families, has raised concerns on how this government is taking money from this fund to pay for their cuts. If we pass this amendment, hold on to this bill, that will give us an opportunity as well to hear from people at Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. We have seen that the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services also raised concerns about this bill. They also wanted to make sure that the funds from this victims of crime fund are going to supporting victims.

I think they deal with some of the most serious issues facing our society, and they deserve to be heard by this government. They represent victims and survivors and all those organizations, not only the group that is representing victims' services organizations but organizations such as Alberta women's shelters, Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. They are on the front lines. They are dealing with victims and survivors of crime on a daily basis. They know what their needs are. I think they deserve to have a say in how the victims of crime fund can be better utilized to help those Albertans heal.

Instead, government is taking that money from those victims to pay for things that none of these groups agree with and none of them were consulted about. It's not just that they are taking money away; they are changing many things in this bill that will change fundamentally eligibility criteria for these victims, how they will qualify for these funds, again, an important issue. All those who are serving victims' service organizations have things to say about that. They should be invited by this government to weigh in on these issues.

They're talking about changing the mandatory surcharge, and they're also eliminating some services. For instance, government is eliminating the injury and witness to homicide benefit, which means the Criminal Injuries Review Board will almost get eliminated. These are some serious changes, and what these changes mean: those who witness homicide may not get any benefits. I think it would be nice to hear from anyone from the front bench why they think that this is a change that we should move ahead with.

5:20

What evidence is there supporting this change? We can stand here and argue about the impacts of someone witnessing a homicide. We can talk about the trauma. We can talk about the psychological impact that it has on an individual. With the advancement in the literature and science, there is, I guess, more evidence to support that unless we treat those things properly, unless we have proper supports in place for these kinds of things, trauma can even be intergenerational. There is enough literature about it.

The most prominent examples will be those from indigenous communities in particular, those who were taken from their homes, were taken to residential schools and the injuries and harm they suffered there. There is enough documented evidence that the trauma they suffered has impacts on generations. There are many

issues that are present and prevalent in our indigenous communities resulting from that intergenerational trauma.

At this point we should be focusing more on using this fund to support those who were victimized and not taking it away from them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or a comment for the Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Anyone?

**The Speaker:** Bueller?

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to join in the amendment debate, RA1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill as it has some serious flaws and, I think, absolutely needs to be referred for further work before it is passed in this House. I want to take us back to about 30 years ago when this victims of crime fund was originally established and talk a little bit about the social contract that was inherent in the decision to create a fund in which people who had been involved in violent criminal activities were paying monies into a fund to help the victims they had caused such great trauma.

I think that it's important for us to understand what the intention and notion was in the establishment of this fund. The underlying social contract was one that said: if you have been a victim of a violent crime, inevitably the consequence for you is deep and personal trauma. Now, we all know that to be true. The types of crimes we're talking about are crimes such as physical assault, sexual assault, rape. You know, all of these kinds of crimes inherently have in them significant long-lasting effects for the people who have been victimized by these crimes. If somebody comes onto your property and steals your bicycle, it is upsetting and a loss of monies and so on, but it's more upsetting to know that somebody violated the integrity of your space, your home, to have something taken away from you.

Now, how much more is the sense of personal violation, the sense of violation of your bodily integrity to be a victim of a violent crime? How much more will it lead to you being unable to address the world around you with a sense of personal safety? That's the issue that's at hand here, that violent crimes result in dramatic and traumatic consequences to the people who have been victimized. Frequently those trauma experiences become lifelong trauma experiences.

As a therapist of many years in the area of child sexual assault I witnessed many people who had experienced sexual assault, mostly, in the work that I did, young people, children and adolescents. I can tell you that while we worked very hard to resolve the issues inherent in having lived through that kind of stressful experience in your life, inevitably we were never able to say to a victim: "That problem is done. It's solved. You're fixed. Go away." That's not how it works. What happens instead is that you work very hard to help that individual to create for themselves the tools to continue to address the outcomes and consequences of that violent assault. You can never say: the trauma is gone. Rather, now what you are saying at the end of good therapeutic process is: while you will continue to have that trauma as part of your historical experience, it no longer needs to be a trauma that defines the nature of yourself and your life moving forward because you have the ability and the tools to frame it in such a way that you feel in control of yourself, you feel in control of your body, and you are re-empowered to live a full and satisfactory life.



That's what we're talking about when we talk about victims of crime. We're talking about getting to the place where they're able to live a satisfactory and full life, and that can only happen through significant intervention. We know that people who have undergone these significant traumas very often end up having secondary issues in their lives. The initial trauma was one of sexual assault, but the ongoing, repetitive traumas for the rest of their lives are traumas associated with their coping mechanisms such as the use of drugs, the use of alcohol, perhaps gambling or some other dysfunctional mechanism of dealing with the trauma that they have experienced.

Because we recognize that experience for people who have been traumatized, we as a social contract in society made the decision to ensure that the people who perpetrated that trauma were contributing to the resolution and the support of people who had experienced that trauma. It's a recognition of how that trauma got created and tying the cause of that trauma to the effect of that trauma. That's what this program was all about.

It was never about government seeking a new tax for its own resources, for its own decision-making. They could have done that. They could have simply said: well, what we'll do is we'll simply increase individual or corporate taxes by a quarter of a per cent, and we'll take those extra dollars, and we'll put it toward victims' services. That would have been an alternative, but they didn't do that. They didn't do that because it's about the social contract, understanding the connection between perpetration and victimization, and the resulting trauma. That's the basis of why we have this program. Now what we have instead is a government saying: "This is not about that social contract anymore. The basis of our actions is not about the trauma you're experiencing; rather, it's about revenues for the government, revenues that the government will use to decide to do what it wants to do in terms of other initiatives or other concerns it may have."

5:30

Now, I know in this case that the government is suggesting that the use of those revenues will be the prevention of crime, which of course I am in favour of. Our government increased monies for rural policing in order to decrease crime. We get that. We support that kind of work. But in betraying this underlying social contract, you're actually breaking the relationship between the cause and effect of perpetration and trauma. Instead, you're suggesting that once the monies come in, even though it was not government money in the first place – this is court money taken from offenders to be given to victims – you're now saying that that is government money, and they can do whatever they want.

Today it happens to be reduction of crime through supports of police officers, which I would hope the government would do, but I want them to do it with a different mechanism. And next time they want to do that, next time they see a surplus in a program like this, they may decide to do something else. Maybe they want to build a bridge somewhere. Maybe they want to fulfill some other government obligation, put some people on a board to do something about, you know, the Alberta flag modifications. You've established the principle that allows you to do that, and that is just really not acceptable.

I know that there have been some concerns expressed by a number of people about this whole process. For example, Alf Rudd, who is the president of the Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association, has very specifically said: "This money was not tax money. It does not belong to you as a government. And now that you're redirecting it toward police officers and prosecutors, you are breaking that underlying social contract." In fact, he goes on to say, and I quote: In terms of this new government and trying to express our concerns to the minister, in particular, we haven't had a whole

lot of success with that. Requests for meetings have been turned down. We did get a half-hour telephone conference with him, but it wasn't with the association. It was with some of our association members who were able to get access through various contacts. And that's all we've had. There have been no ongoing discussions, no opportunity to ask questions, and no opportunity to participate in consultations when it comes to the uses of the funds.

End quote. I will submit this later on.

That's a pretty devastating thing to hear from the Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association. I think that speaks to the fact that people who are central to this have not been appropriately consulted.

Less than an hour ago I got off the phone with representatives of Treaty 8, who clearly told me that Treaty 8 have not been consulted on this. They haven't even been informed about this. I was the person informing them about the nature of this bill. I'm very concerned that the indigenous community is yet again being overlooked on a bill that very particularly addresses concerns that they have, because we know that indigenous people are more likely to be victims of crimes than any other segment of our society. Now, that's a tragedy. That's a failure of the structure of our society that that is occurring, and it is incumbent upon us to begin to address that failure by including indigenous people in the decisions that are going to affect them, which is the basis of all treaties. If we fail to do that, we are betraying yet another contract that we have made, not just a social contract in this case but an actual physical treaty, a contract with the indigenous people in this province. I think that that's a travesty. I think it's unacceptable that we're here again saying: we're going to do something that is important to you as indigenous people, but we are not going to talk to you about it. I think that's extremely problematic.

I certainly would like to see this government take the time to do this properly. If they'd actually said, "Look, the Auditor General says that we have a surplus in this fund, and we need to do something about it," they could have taken the time to sit down with the indigenous people and said, "What do you think these surplus funds could properly be used for in the indigenous community to reduce the trauma that indigenous people have been experiencing as a result of their overrepresentation in crimes of violence and trauma?" They could have done that. They would have heard indigenous people talk about things like sentencing circles and community sentencing and the opportunity for the victims to confront their offenders and talk to those offenders about how the trauma has hurt them.

In the indigenous community they have two goals: the resolution of the individual trauma and the remediation or the correction of the offender's behaviour. Indigenous people don't want to simply punish offenders and throw them in jail and throw away the key. They want them to change. They want them to be new people, to be contributors to a better society, to help raise the children in their community in a positive way. They need an opportunity to sit with those offenders, to help them understand the implications of their negative behaviour, and to offer their support to the offenders to participate in a process of transformation that has positive consequences not only for the victim but for the offender and, even more importantly perhaps, for the whole community and the children being raised in that community. That's what it is they would tell you that they would like to have happen.

Did this government go and say: "Look, we have these extra funds. We certainly would like to address crime in the indigenous community from your perspective, to do the things that you would like to see done from your cultural, historical point of view"? No, they did not do that. They broke the underlying social contract of

crime and trauma and instead used it as a slush fund for other government choices.

I'm not complaining about the fact that you want to increase police services in this province. I get that. But the government has a mechanism for doing that. They have a taxation process in which they can raise funds and provide those funds to the communities. Now they're actually not doing that and making municipalities do that. They're taking money away, and now they're taking it away from victims, too. Completely unacceptable.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

**Mr. Getson:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll make this one pretty brief. I've, you know, listened to the last several speakers from the members opposite. Their backgrounds are predominantly in the social services area, and they're very understanding of the victims' services side on these files. I know that they're speaking from the heart.

But a few things that are stepping outside, that I feel I must speak about, are about that consultation process. Now, that kept jumping out. I, you know, heard the Member for Lethbridge-West talking about consultation, how this government and us as MLAs don't do our consultation. I couldn't help but think about the Bighorn and the parks that are out in that area. Mr. Speaker, I know that you're familiar with that as well. I had lots of constituents talking about that.

Consultation on Bill 6. I think it was a farming act or something that we ended up repealing. I know there was lots of consultation that took place there. You know, I'm new to this, but I got to find out all about consultation when I heard about that one.

Rural crime. We've heard about lots of consultation on rural crime. We were at those places. We offered and made those extensions a number of times for folks to come and talk about rural crime, to come to our areas. We weren't taken up on that. But we've been consulting on that.

How about those coal phase-outs in Keeyik, phasing out the coal industry? I was challenged by the Member for — what is it? — Edmonton-Gold Bar, I believe, to go out and actually talk to those union members. Well, I did some consultation, talked about the hard things, how we couldn't turn it around, how we couldn't put things back on track because the other group had already gone too far out the gate.

5:40

When we're talking about, you know, the First Nations groups — so the Paul band. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was a former Indigenous Relations minister, so he has lots of breadth and depth to it, but again his slant on this, typically, always goes back to the social side. When I sat at the table for the first time, not even as the MLA but just as a person who went out there to meet him for the first time as a nomination contestant, I got a chance to tour their site with one of the councillors and also with the chief. The problem was that we never talked about the social side of it. We never talked about the healing lodges. We never talked about sweat lodges. We didn't talk about any of that.

When we were talking about the problems out there, it was about infrastructure. They've got 55 clicks for the road. They have \$155,000 a year to deal with it. They can't get ambulance service. They can't get fire service. They can't get a bunch of things out there because of it. When they're talking crime, they're talking the social fabric that's being torn apart, the drug issues in Old Town. It's because they don't have the RCMP officer anymore.

When I sat at the table, probably one of the most politically incorrect things to say, and we started talking about the issues, I

said: I hear from the folks outside of your community that you guys are the problem, that there's a big crime problem here. There was silence, and then it was absolute truth. One of the councillors said: you know, we've got a problem. I think it was Mrs. Rabbit, Myrna Rabbit, that had said at the time: "You know, there was a judge that came out, and he paid attention, too, from the Stony Plain courthouse. He said that 30 per cent, roughly, of his court load is based on folks from our community." She said: "We've got drug issues down here. We've got bad guys. We used to have a constable. We don't have that anymore. We got the drug issues that are taking place. They're pulling my kids off the track," and she said, "It's causing all that." So then I went and ended up talking to this judge. Sure enough, 30 per cent of his caseload is from that community, and it's because we don't have the policing and the infrastructure there. When we're talking about these issues — now here's the interesting thing: it all connects back down to downtown Edmonton.

When you look at these harm-reduction units and these failed policies, why is it that the cowboy from West Henday — that would be me. As soon as you step over the Member for Edmonton-West Henday and you go over that little line, as soon as you get onto the Yellowhead — why is the Chinese community calling me? Why are they calling the cowboy kid, apparently, to come down to Chinatown and talk about all these issues? Because it's falling on deaf ears. When those units were going into place, they were protesting against it. They had a 4,000-person petition. They had people out there holding signs. They were not consulted with. They got steamrolled over top of by everyone involved. MLA for Edmonton-City Centre, you didn't listen to your constituents; they're reaching out to me.

Let's get back to the point here. Let's not politicize this. Let's look at the broader picture. We're trying to do the right thing. One of the gentlemen is fixated on the monies, that we might take the monies and build a bridge. Well, how about we build a bridge here? Let's build a bridge to fixing the problem. Let's stop talking about the minutiae on the details of managing budgets because we all know their history of managing budgets. Let's do the right things with the dollars that we have. Let's look at the big picture. Let's get back on the bill and start debating that because we do want to do the right thing, and it's all absolutely genuine and in the right place. We might go at it from a different lens, but don't hold that against us because I'll pull out all your non consultations over the number of years.

I'll leave any time left for anyone who wants to respond to that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there are 22 seconds remaining.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to amendment RA1? The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was interesting.

Let's go back to the point of this. We're talking about an amendment to Bill 16, which is Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, 2020. Let's be clear about what this is. This is an amendment to make significant changes to a bill. I'm actually going to use some of the words that were released by the Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association in a press release. They talked about what some of their concerns were.

Now, again, as my colleague said, they represent 73 police-based victim services associations right across the province from rural communities, urban communities, suburban communities — whatever that means. They're very clear when they say that Bill 16

... will see the tearing down of the fundamental principles entrenched in the original Victims of Crime Act created in 1990.

[It] collected a surcharge on fines assessed for various offences . . . [so] these are not tax dollars . . . The money supports a cohort of volunteers in every corner of Alberta to be there in times of crisis to . . . assist when tragedy strikes.

Let's be clear about what this is. We're talking about a fund that has accumulated and grown. My colleague spoke earlier today about the plan that was in place to address some of that; yes, it does take time. But let's be clear about what this bill intends to do. It intends to use this fund to pay for policing and other initiatives that they've yet to really explain to us in detail. I mean, they can talk about their consultation all they like. I think that we can all agree that rural crime is a problem. That is not the issue. The issue is the victims of crime fund and how it's going to be raided and used for a purpose other than what it was established for. That's what this bill is doing, and that's why it needs to go to committee.

Now, again, you know, the member talks about: I'll pull your record on consultation and whatever. Let's talk about this record of consultation. It seems to be: "Let's make the changes. Then we'll consult later, and weirdly enough our consultation results will match exactly what we planned to do." That's not how you consult. You go into it not knowing the answer. You go into it asking the appropriate open-ended questions, and you let people tell you. That's when you find out all kinds of things.

I'm going to focus a little bit on St. Albert, which is my community, and the community next door, which is Morinville. Morinville and St. Albert actually have their own victims' services unit for those of you that didn't know. So that particular unit will lose its funding because of this change. Now, let me tell you a little bit about this community. You know, what I did find out is that on the website of Victim Services Alberta, they gave us a range of what the average budgets are for the different-sized communities. I think it's important to note that, the kind of money that we're talking about on an annual basis. The current funding model in terms of annual grants that come directly from victims of crime: for large municipal centres it's about \$600,000 a year, for mid-size municipal centres it's about \$300,000 a year, and all others are capped at \$150,000 a year. Now, that should tell you quite a bit, that these communities do an incredible amount of work with very little money.

These grants are not huge. They tend to pay for, obviously, some training and some administrative support, but the vast majority of work is done by volunteers. The last time I spoke about this bill, I mentioned that quite a few years ago I volunteered with victims' services for about a year. So I'm able to tell you first-hand the enormous amount of training that is involved – thank goodness that that training was available – and then ongoing training to help you out and then mentoring with other volunteers, because that volunteer work is some of the most intense volunteer work that I've ever done in my life. You are responding to situations and supporting people at the lowest moment of their lives. You never imagined that you would be there doing that. I cannot tell you how valuable that training is. Those volunteers would absolutely not be able to do their volunteer jobs without that training.

That money is going to be gone because of the changes that this government is introducing – why? – to fix another problem that also needs to be fixed. I don't understand how taking it from one group – absolutely, victims of crime need to be supported. Rural policing or addressing rural crime absolutely needs to be done as well.

You know, I heard the member say: well, a lot of people over there are social workers. I don't know if he counted. I don't think we have actually that many social workers. I think he likes to label us all as social workers. That's fine. But I think that if you look at the research and you start to look at the problems associated with crime in communities, they are associated with social problems. We're all people. We're all social beings. That is the nature of the

vast majority of crime, whether it's problems with addiction, whether it's poverty, whether it's a history of abuse. That is the reality, as ugly as that is. That is the reality.

I wish that we didn't need a victims of crime fund. I wish that the fund wasn't so huge because of the surcharges that are levied. I wish it wasn't, but that is the reality today. Removing this money, also removing – it's not compensation – the little bits of money that we are giving victims of crime so that they can start to heal and find their feet again is a tragedy. For the government to say, "No, don't worry; we'll consult; we'll figure it out; we have to do it because we have this other problem" – you have two problems. You need to address them both, and raiding a fund to pay for another is not okay. This is going to impact communities like St. Albert and like Morinville.

5:50

I can tell you some of the positions in St. Albert. These are the volunteer jobs. These are the requirements of the people that volunteer in St. Albert. They have court advocates, in case you didn't know. They help people navigate the system. They help them apply for restitution. They help them fill out the multitude of forms associated with injuries or benefits. They do court prep. They actually go in with people and assist them as they go through that system. They help them write victim impact statements. They actually help them practise. These are volunteers, victims' advocates. They have to commit to one 12-hour shift per week. Some are night shifts, some are overnight, and some are during the day. Every four to six weeks they have to be available for a whole weekend to be on call to go to an occurrence. I'm not going to describe them all. That is an incredible commitment, and for what? For the size of this community their grant is probably \$300,000 a year. That pays for training and some administration so that they have a team of trained volunteers that can go out and do this work. That's just St. Albert.

Morinville also has a program that deals with all kinds of issues in the Sturgeon county area. Interesting thing that I don't know if Morinville and Sturgeon victims' services still have, but they had an on-site certified service dog as well to assist with victims. That's the kind of incredible work that goes on in victims' services. This is a service or this is a program that this government is deliberately stopping while saying: "Hey. Trust us. We'll consult. Don't worry. Everything will be fine." It's not fine. It is not fine. You have an organization representing over 70 victims' services in this province from every corner of this province saying to the government that this is not okay. If you defund this, it is going to be a problem.

I'll tell you, you know, that St. Albert has done a great job in terms of addressing a lot of – I know the member thinks it's a little bit entertaining that we talk about the social side of crime, but the RCMP in St. Albert have actually taken that approach as well. They spend a lot of time and effort looking at prevention and looking at lines of communication that they can have with young people, with seniors, with people at risk. They do a lot of work, actually, in terms of prevention, and I think that we're seeing that in a lot of areas, that crime is coming down. But I did look at the St. Albert crime stats, and it is a problem in St. Albert. There is a reason that victims' services are so busy.

The stats that I could find for 2018-19: there's a 23 per cent increase in sexual assaults. There's a 17 per cent increase in 2018-19 in other sexual offences. So just taking those two, not including injuries related to motor vehicles, property destruction or crime, theft, none of that – this is a small community of, I think, under 67,000 people that is dealing with these kinds of issues. It is because they have a program and a service like victims' services that they're able to do the incredible work that they do.

A couple of years ago I went to a fundraiser for St. Albert Victim Services. It was really great to have all the volunteers. Of course, there are a lot of members of the RCMP as they work actually out of the building. There are members of the military. A lot of members of the military call St. Albert home. This particular work was so important to them. It was amazing to hear them talk about how much they valued the work of victims' services and how important it was to them. They understand that these grants aren't enough to cover all of the training requirements, so there's an ongoing need to fund raise.

I find it incredible, the short-sightedness of this government, to defund something as valuable – you know, if you're going to talk about the benefit for the investment, what an incredible benefit. You're making a tiny little investment in terms of an annual grant, and you're getting hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of free hours by trained, skilled volunteers that are helping communities at times that most of us can't even imagine. That's really sad. It's incredibly sad to me.

Some of the things that volunteers with victims' services – and I want to put this on the record because I want the people of St. Albert and Morinville and Sturgeon county to know that there are some people in this place that value the work of victims' services for the small investment that they get out of the victims of crime fund. I want them to understand that we are here fighting for this, to keep it, because we understand the value.

We know the work that they do. They connect victims to community agencies, to Crown prosecutors, to children and family services. For any of you that have ever tried to navigate children and family services, it is not easy. It is particularly not easy when you're dealing with a family crisis. Shelters: even navigating shelter systems in this province is not easy. Counselling: I'm sure people get calls into your constituency offices all the time, people looking for counselling and they can't afford just a regular counsellor. It is not easy to find those resources, but that's what these victims' services advocates do all the time. Even helping someone navigate through a system as difficult as the medical examiner's office: I don't know if any of you have, unfortunately, had to deal with that office and the reports that come and the processes involved. It is not easy, but that is, again, something that victim advocates do.

So when you vote to eliminate this fund and to defund victims' services right across the province, I want everybody to understand what you're doing, where you're taking the money from. We all agree that rural crime is a problem and needs investment, but we do not agree that raiding this fund to fund something else that is as important is the right way to go. Not one bit. Not at all.

You know, some of the other crimes that these victim advocates are trained to deal with – and I would like to list them because I

want you to know how important the training is and how diverse the training is. Happily, in my short time as a volunteer with victims' services, I did not have to deal with all of these situations, but I have certainly heard examples and been trained by people that did. Sudden death actually happens more frequently than you might think, so knowing how to support someone who has had someone die at home, a sudden death or suicide: you can imagine the training that is required. Assaults – obviously, that is an obvious one that happens far too frequently – sexual assault; supporting a family, again, through a suicide: to be able to rely on the training that you receive through these victims' services units and the training that is funded through the grants is essential for them to be able to do that work.

And if you don't think that this is an amazing investment in our future, you're absolutely wrong. I would encourage each and every one of you to reach out to your victims' service program in your community, because you have one, and speak to them. Ask them – ask them – what it's going to do when you remove their grant. Ask them. Ask them what your community will be like without these volunteers, and they will tell you that it is vitally important. So to hear this government repeatedly stand up and say, you know: we're doing this because we want to address these other issues . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for St. Albert, who I guess helped us to understand the scope of what these services are. And then categorically what I'm starting to think of and realize is the importance of separating the funding for justice and for policing and victims' services. Like, to have those somehow meshed together confuses the issue categorically. If you were somehow incentivizing judges and/or the judicial system and police to, you know, have this fund grow by the convictions that they might be able to achieve, because that money goes back to them, then I think there's some inherent confusion that you are creating, perhaps inadvertently, from this particular bill. I think that we've all learned a lot, and I thank you for helping to create this scope both from the personal experience that the member had working with victims' services . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. However, the time is now 6 p.m., and the House stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]





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