



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, July 6, 2020

Day 39

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, July 6, 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 interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen

Hon. members, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. In observation of the COVID-19 public health guidelines outlined by Dr. Hinshaw, please refrain from joining Brooklyn in the language of your choice.

Ms Elhard:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.
Thank you, Brooklyn.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests and visitors joining us today. Members, guests of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford seated in the Speaker's gallery are Arthur Noskey, Treaty 8 grand chief; and Adam North Peigan, president of the Sixties Scoop Indigenous Society of Alberta. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us this afternoon in my gallery are guests of the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre: the Honorary Consul of Barbados, Rawle Carter; and Lloyd Cardinal, the co-chair of the indigenous circle with EndPovertyEdmonton. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, guests of the hon. Member for Livingstone-McLeod: a delegation from the Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association is joining us.

Also joining us are Aiden Douglas and Darbie Fraser of the Crownst Consolidated high school, where Aiden was the valedictorian in the 2020 class. Congratulations, Aiden.

Guests of the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore joining us today: Ravi and Rajni Bale. They are the parents of the late Ritvik and Rashmi Bale and are friends and supporters.

Hon. members, please welcome our guests to the Assembly today.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a statement.

Economic Recovery

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Amid the economic devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented crash in oil prices, Albertans have risen to the challenge and have demonstrated our province's culture of resiliency. Now, our government is stepping forward with an ambitious long-term strategy to build our province under three main pillars: creating jobs, building infrastructure that will spur economic growth, and continuing to diversify Alberta's economy.

With the immediate acceleration of the job-creation tax cut, Alberta's corporate income tax rate will drop to 8 per cent a year and a half ahead of schedule. This ensures that Alberta has a competitive tax regime for job creators, which is essential to our recovery. The acceleration of the job-creation tax cut means Alberta's corporate income tax will be 50 per cent lower than British Columbia's when investment is most needed here.

The year 2020 will see Alberta's largest ever investment in the province's infrastructure, with \$10 billion being spent on projects in every corner of this province. By taking unprecedented action to create jobs now, our government is helping communities build bigger, brighter futures that support long-term private-sector job growth.

Albertans have dutifully followed the instructions of medical professionals to ensure that we safely make it through the COVID-19 pandemic, and our recovery plan puts them first. That's why we are asking Ottawa to remove most occupational categories under the temporary foreign worker program for Alberta. [An electronic device sounded]

Mr. Speaker, this is a common-sense plan that balances targeted government spending with strong incentives for private-sector growth. It is a recovery plan that ensures a future for Canada's largest economic subsector, oil and gas, while boosting diversification in key growth sectors. Albertans elected us because we are committed to rebuilding this province's reputation as a destination for business and investment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It sounded a lot to me like there was a cellphone infraction. I couldn't quite recognize whose phone it might have been. Perhaps he's in a disguise, but I'm sure he'll be happy to make a contribution to the food bank on my behalf.

Job Creation Strategy and Fiscal Policies

Ms Phillips: There is no jobs plan for Alberta. There is a strategy to siphon billions to shareholders outside of our province. A year ago the UCP government promised a jobs strategy, in air quotes, with a massive multibillion-dollar giveaway to wealthy corporations, who then funnelled that money out of Alberta. The result was, before the pandemic, 50,000 jobs lost, the economy shrank, the deficit ballooned by a billion dollars, but foreign shareholders and CEOs got rich, and after solid growth in 2017 and '18, every big bank downgraded their expectations for Alberta.

When the pandemic hit, the Premier had a decision to make. He decided that \$4.7 billion in handouts wasn't enough, so he gave more to his wealthy friends. He also asked Albertans to accept a billion and a half dollars in new income tax and fees. The UCP tried to hide that in the budget they rammed through at the beginning of the pandemic, hoping, I guess, that we wouldn't notice.

Meanwhile small businesses closed, our credit rating gets downgraded further, downtowns across Alberta are hollowing out, there are questions about our jobs future, the future of small businesses. As an answer the UCP is stoking a separatist agenda as

a distraction, hoping a long conversation about the Constitution will distract us from their jobs failures. But separatism scares away investment. That happened in Quebec when they flirted with separatism. Jobs left the province by the thousands.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta that I want is what I hear from ordinary people. People want a broadened, diversified, resilient economy. They want a good future for their children, jobs for now and into the future. To do that, we need a real jobs plan that puts Albertans, not the wealthy and the well-connected, first in our hearts and in our actions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod is standing.

Weekly Newspapers

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you grew up in rural Alberta like I did, you look forward to your weekly community newspaper. The Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association, representatives of whom are gathered in the gallery today, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Throughout all that time community newspapers have continued to do the important tasks that they have been assigned, not just taking national and international news and putting it into a local lens but also reporting on their communities.

My friend Frank McTighe, publisher of the oldest newspaper in Alberta, the *Fort Macleod Gazette*, puts it this way. "If you read the weekly paper of 1908 and then you read the weekly paper of 2008, you can see the similarities in what they did, which was to report on what was going on in the district. And that's what made the community paper successful for all those years."

1:40

We are in a time of unprecedented disruption. News cycles change more and more quickly as access to technology feeds us information at breakneck speeds, yet in the middle of all of this our weeklies provide stability, and they provide focus. When your paper only hits the press once a week, editors become experts at what actually matters and what it is that the people of their communities need to know. Mr. Speaker, the editors and journalists of these papers know their communities. They aren't people who take their cues from the overcaffeinated rhetoric of Twitter; they're people who listen to their communities in the coffee shops, the restaurants, and at the local businesses. It is this that has allowed Alberta's weeklies to remain relevant and trusted by all Albertans.

I want to thank the members of the AWWNA who have joined us today. I want to thank all of Alberta's weekly papers for the important work they do, ensuring that news is accessible everywhere in our great province.

Thank you.

Economic Recovery and Child Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier unveiled his economic recovery plan, but it left out what thousands of Albertans actually need to get back to work, a plan for families that addresses school and child care. There is no economic recovery without child care. Let me say that again, since the Premier and the Minister of Children's Services clearly have not been listening to economists, parents, or businesses. There is no economic recovery without child care.

If you still won't listen to me, listen to Ashley, a small-business owner from Banff. She's a parent of two young kids and a restaurant owner. She was able to start her business because she had affordable child care through the \$25 per day pilot project, which just ended at

her centre last week. Ashley's business has been hit hard by the pandemic, and like many parents she's trying to work with little kids at home. She's worried she'll be pushed out of her business without access to affordable and quality child care.

The UCP claims to value small businesses and job creators, but all they offer is lip service and tax cuts to multibillion-dollar corporations. The path back to real and sustainable growth is not through tax breaks for the richest but policies that invest in all areas of economic participation. The evidence is clear that for every \$1 you invest in child care, you get double the return in economic growth.

That's why on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that access to affordable child care is the foundation for economic recovery. It's why our plan for universal, \$25-per-day child care would allow families and working mothers like Ashley to run their businesses and continue contributing to Alberta's economy. It would also allow for much-needed job creation in the child care sector. It would allow kids to receive quality early childhood education in the critical early years so they will require fewer educational and health supports later on in life.

Investment in early childhood education creates jobs, supports entrepreneurs, and gets parents back to work. Mr. Speaker, this government needs to stop treating the economy as something separate from the people that make it work. This government is failing Alberta families, and it will also fail the economy because – guess what? – they're the same thing.

Daxton Bennett

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you about a man who, through his courage and genuine spirit, uplifts not only myself but his community as well. Daxton Bennett is the epitome of the type of Albertan who lives in West Yellowhead. He is hard-working, humble, lighthearted, and anyone who interacts with him leaves feeling better than they did before.

But Dax is not feeling better these days. Unfortunately, at 41 years old Dax recently found out he has stage 4 thymoma cancer and now will have to fight for his life. Dax has a beautiful family alongside him in this battle. He has two wonderful daughters, Paige and Lucy, and a loving wife, Kim, who happens to be hilarious, by the way. He's also a man of profound faith who's always been willing to share about his personal trials in order to show others that they are not alone. The virtue of his character is such that while struggling with such a devastating disease, not only has he not turned away from his faith in God, but his belief in and reliance on God continue to deepen.

Dax started chemotherapy at the Cross Cancer centre at the University of Alberta campus and has since transferred to Barrhead in order to continue treatment and be closer to home. He, like many Albertans, is fortunate to receive his treatment from some of the best, most knowledgeable cancer professionals in Canada and indeed around the world.

In a recent conversation after I asked Dax how he was doing, he let me know he was doing really well and then said: but more importantly, how are you doing? It is this selfless kind of attitude that has drawn so many people to love Dax and cherish the time spent with him. Dax, whatever the future may hold for you and your family, know that our thoughts and prayers are with you and the many other Albertans facing similar battles. Mr. Speaker, may we never take our health for granted and strive like Dax to enjoy each day to its fullest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Calgary Storm Damage Costs

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On June 13 northeast Calgary was devastated by a hailstorm causing an estimated \$1 billion in damages to homes and vehicles. If this wasn't bad enough, many families had already been suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many had lost their jobs or had their hours cut back significantly, and as a result they had to scale back or cancel their insurance altogether.

The hailstorm was a natural disaster that couldn't be avoided, and we believe in times like this the government should be there for people to help them rebuild and get their lives back to normal, but it took too long for this government to act and promise relief. When they finally did, the relief fell well short of what's needed to help rebuild. It only includes overland flooding, and does nothing to help with hail damage. In the end, the Premier has deemed it hail disaster relief funding, but it doesn't actually provide relief for hail damage.

Instead of smoke and mirrors, the people of Calgary need real help. We are calling on this government to do the following: immediately address the gap between private insurance coverage and support available through the disaster recovery program so that nobody falls through the cracks; commit resources to accelerate claim processing; provide supports to residents to help them navigate their insurance claims and advocate for fair coverage; commit to transparency by releasing the number of claims received, claims processed, and the total of both insured and uninsured damages; and address the lack of coverage for taxi owner-operators.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Medically Unfit Drivers

Ms Issik: In 2017 our Calgary community was struck by tragedy. Rashmi and Ritvik Bale, 24 and 20 years old, were killed in a parking lot by a driver with a medical condition that causes seizures. Today would have been Rashmi's 27th birthday. This tragedy left the family, friends, and colleagues of Rashmi and Ritvik, many of whom are here today, grieving with a hole in their hearts. Sadly, this story is all too common.

Medically unfit drivers contribute one-third of all traffic crashes. Rashmi and Ritvik's parents are reminded of their loss every day when they drive past a repair shop whose tagline is, quote, where accidents unhappen, unquote. But accidents never unhappen. Yes, damaged vehicles can be repaired, but the loss of life cannot. Neither can the impacts on family, friends or community.

Alberta is the only province that does not require physicians to report medically unfit drivers. Let's learn from the rest of the country. When Ontario mandated reporting, it reduced the risk of serious crashes by about 45 per cent. Albertans have advocated that our government do the same.

In a report to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Judge Wilberg, an Alberta Provincial Court judge, said, "The obvious first measure is to recommend mandatory reporting by physicians of unfit drivers." He's not the only Albertan calling for mandatory reporting.

Today I will table a petition with over 3,000 signatures petitioning to urge the government of Alberta to introduce legislation to require mandatory reporting by physicians of medically unfit drivers.

Let us remember the lives of Rashmi and Ritvik Bale. Make a commitment today to undertake one safe-driving measure for yourself. Offer a friend or a neighbour a ride if you think it might be unsafe for them to drive. It takes all of us to make our roads safer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time is now 1:50.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Corporate Taxation and Job Creation

Ms Hoffman: On Canada Day last year the Premier implemented his \$4.7 billion corporate handout. The Premier's approach was flawed. His handout went straight into shareholders' pockets without creating any new Alberta jobs. Before the pandemic and the oil crash Alberta had lost 50,000 jobs already. Last week the Premier announced that he's doubling down on his no-jobs corporate handout. Why didn't the Premier come up with a real plan to regain even some of the 50,000 jobs that he lost before the pandemic?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that Albertans have said loud and clear to me in my constituency is that they are so thankful that the NDP are not in power right now. They have a government that understands business. They have a government that understands investment and how to create jobs in this province. That's why we're so proud that a year and a half early we have a job-creation tax cut fully implemented in this province of Alberta. It's going to spur growth and investment in Alberta. We now have an Alberta advantage again. We're proud of that.

Ms Hoffman: Except it doesn't work. The minister knows it doesn't work. The Premier knows it doesn't work. They lost 50,000 full-time jobs before the pandemic and before the downturn.

Albertans have seen this movie before. It starts with Husky, that took \$233 million in handouts and then laid off hundreds of Albertans, and then EnCana took \$55 million and pulled its headquarters from Calgary. Fifty thousand Albertans lost their jobs before the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands more have lost their jobs since. Albertans need a real jobs plan, not a multimillion-dollar boondoggle corporate handout. Why won't the Premier stand up for Alberta workers?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I'll give you a little demonstration of an NDP jobs plan. That was to give out free shower heads and light bulbs and have people come to your house and screw in a light bulb. That's an NDP jobs plan.

We believe in the private sector. We believe in the hundred thousand companies that will benefit from this job-creation tax cut so they can hire that next Albertan. We can have confidence in the future. We can go and tell people in other parts of the country: "Come to Alberta. Invest here. Grow here." We believe in job creators, and we'll make sure that we get that done for Albertans.

Ms Hoffman: Light bulbs usually signify a new idea; clearly, this government is completely out of them. They're doubling down on a failed plan that resulted in more than 50,000 job losses before the pandemic. The Premier's own Finance staff told him that a massive corporate giveaway wouldn't create jobs. Alberta should be supporting businesses with world-class schools, public education, health care, and innovation, but the Premier has his ear plugs in and his blinders on. It's a race to the bottom; that is the only plan for this Premier. How many jobs is this Premier and the UCP government willing to lose before they admit that their multibillion-dollar corporate handout is a huge failure?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the aisle we stand up against policies that don't work like the NDP carbon tax. That was one of our first bills, getting rid of that NDP carbon tax. We

challenged that in court. They told us that we were foolish to challenge their carbon tax. You know what? Our Court of Appeal struck that down. They said: no; that's unconstitutional. We can't wait to take that fight to the Supreme Court. We will always be on the side of job creators and the workers of the province. When will they stand up for the workers? Today they brought Gil McGowan to a committee to comment on something. He has opposed every pipeline ever. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: The UCP's approach to the economy, with barely a whisper about jobs but an accelerated tax giveaway to already wealthy people who don't even live here, was accompanied the next day by a double-credit downgrade by ratings agency Fitch. I'm wondering if the government can respond to some very clear questions about their announcement, about the consequences for our financial position. They could just respond in writing to the House if they don't know the answers right now. What are the incremental new borrowing costs following these credit downgrades? What are the estimates for forgone revenue and for job creation?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the one thing I will comment on is that the NDP continue to provide false information about the job-creation tax cut. We all know the number that they allege, and let me tell them this right now: that number is way off.

One thing I want to know: does that Member for Lethbridge-West still believe in free shower heads and light bulbs? Does she still believe that a jobs plan for Alberta involves people literally coming to your house and screwing in a light bulb? Mr. Speaker, is that that member's plan for jobs for Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, small businesses are really suffering this year, right now. Twenty per cent say that they likely won't survive. People are worried about the future for their towns, the future for their kids. Will the government acknowledge that saving Alberta small businesses should be a higher priority for this government, that jobs and small businesses are more important than windfalls on Wall Street, and that the commitment to small business is a tiny fraction of the giveaway to already wealthy multinational companies and people who don't even live here?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has given tremendous support to small businesses throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. From the very early days of the pandemic we introduced deferrals and supports for all small businesses. We recently introduced a small- and medium-business grant of up to \$5,000 to help small businesses. We participated in the federal CECRA program. We introduced our own Bill 23 to fill in the gaps of the CECRA program. All told, the suite of products that we've introduced give our province amongst the highest support of all provinces in this country.

Ms Phillips: Well, all of that is far too little and far too late, Mr. Speaker.

Now, rating agency Fitch says that the UCP hasn't formally detailed the extent of its current fiscal challenges nor, quote, provided firm details on a path towards recovery. What would help here is a focus on jobs, not protracted constitutional battles and certainly not a government-funded soapbox for separatists. Will the

government stop the bleed of jobs and investment from Alberta by dismissing the separatists from their caucus, or is a government policy of scaring investors a small price to pay for keeping their caucus and party together?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the one thing I want to make sure that this House is clear on is that this party over here, this government, trusts voters. We trust voters. The NDP call referendums antidemocratic power grabs. Shame on them. We empower Albertans to make decisions about their future.

As well, when it comes to jobs, in my constituency they are so happy that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is no longer the Finance minister of this province. They're happy about that. They trust this government to get it right. We're in a tough spot, but we're going to keep battling for the future.

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

Pension Fund Administration

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the UCP government caucus members voted as a block to recommend against my Bill 203, the Pension Protection Act, being debated in this House. This is a profound insult to the nearly 35,000 people who have signed the petition at handsoffmccp.ca and the thousands who wrote to the committee when stakeholder feedback was invited. To the Premier: what do you have to say to the tens of thousands of Albertans who want to see Bill 203 debated in this place? Why is your government still afraid to have a debate on these important topics right here?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the irony of this question is not lost on me. We trust Albertans. The one thing that we've said clearly is that if we were going to proceed with changing CPP, that decision would be left with Albertans. Do you know what the NDP think about that? They called that an antidemocratic power grab. That is absolutely ridiculous. On that issue they don't know if they're coming or going or coming or going. I guess we'll find out today what the temperature of the week is.

Ms Gray: Trust them, Mr. Speaker? This government didn't even tell them about the pension changes.

I think that the minister might be confused about what we're talking about here. Last week the government contravened a portion of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act by withholding the release of the trust fund's annual report and providing a bogus excuse to do so. We know that the real reason they suppressed the report was because it will show Albertans that this Premier's preferred investment manager made a colossal mistake. We know that the report was already read. The audited copy was posted and then quickly removed from the committee's internal website. Premier, when will you stop trying to hide the truth about AIMCo's recent disastrous losses from Albertans?

The Speaker: I'm having a little bit of a challenge connecting the two questions, but we'll let the hon. Minister of Justice answer indeed.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take this moment just to remind this House that there is currently a world-wide pandemic. The member may have forgotten that and thought it might make sense to politicize everything under the sun, but a little professional advice: that's not the case here. In due course this will be provided to the House, this Assembly. That is a normal operation. The one thing that we do appreciate is our public servants and the amazing

job that they have done in this pandemic. We've asked them to do more. They've delivered for Albertans. Shame on the NDP for trying to politicize everything during this pandemic.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, during a pandemic this Premier insists that he's going to study pulling out of the Canada pension plan, but the evidence is already clear. This is a very bad idea, one that his polling shows a majority of Albertans do not want. So who exactly is the Premier listening to: his former federal cabinet buddy and now Wexit leader, Jay Hill, or perhaps his separatist pal, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat? To the Premier: when will you end your needless slow dance with the separatist fringe? It's time for you to end this distraction about a vote on leaving CPP, something a strong majority of patriotic Albertans have no interest in. When will you show us you're actually . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you who we will not listen to on this one. It's Gil McGowan, their star witness today, the person who has opposed every pipeline, the person who won't tell us how much he's planning on trying to spend on the next election. But you know what's coming? We're going to end his ability to spend on the next election. We're proud of that \$30,000 cap. That's coming. I can't wait for it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is rising with a question.

2:00 Premier's Speech Writer's Remarks on Residential Schools

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the chiefs of the sovereign Treaty 8 First Nations have joined countless other indigenous leaders in calling for this Premier's racist speech writer to be fired. A statement released last hour says that if the Premier, quote, chooses to continue this individual's employment, it blatantly demonstrates that this government's views are much the same as the speech writer and has no interest in building trust and working collaboratively with indigenous communities. End quote. To the Premier. Treaty 8 Grand Chief Arthur Noskey is here in the gallery today. Will you answer the call of Treaty 8 and fire Paul Bunner here and now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have met with many chiefs over the past couple of weeks about this issue, and our government is committed to moving towards true reconciliation and partnership with indigenous Albertans, standing with them against any form of racism. Just this past week I had a very productive meeting with Grand Chief Willie Littlechild and Mr. Bunner. We talked over this, and we had a good, honest conversation. We agreed that we can walk through this journey of reconciliation together, and Grand Chief Littlechild told me that we need to promote reconciliation through diplomacy and understanding.

Mr. Feehan: Marlene Poitras, AFN regional chief, and the confederacy of Treaty 6 chiefs have called on you to fire Paul Bunner. Chief Roy Fox of Kainai Nation says, "We call upon the province to make the right decision and dismiss this person." Today Treaty 8 Grand Chief Arthur Noskey and Adam North Peigan, president of SSISA, and Lloyd Cardinal with EndPovertyEdmonton are here in the gallery, calling for Paul Bunner to be fired. To the

Premier: why are you ignoring all of these indigenous leaders and protecting your racist speech writer?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, indigenous people in Canada have faced systemic discrimination for far too long, including the horrific experience of residential schools, in which some 150,000 indigenous children attended and 6,000 died. Reconciliation requires relationship and honest dialogue. Our government's approach to reconciliation is what Grand Chief Willie Littlechild tells me. We need reconciliation. Rather than symbolic gestures this government is taking real action so that indigenous communities can be true partners in prosperity with us.

Mr. Feehan: No action.

The Premier likes to say that racism is "pernicious and durable," and he's showing us exactly how that happens. Racism endures when you fail to confront it, when you make excuses for it, when you call it a difference of opinion, and when you pretend that 2013 is the distant past. Paul Bunner enjoys a highly paid position of influence in our province as one of the Premier's closet collaborators. Paul Bunner harbours a profound hatred and contempt for indigenous people. Why won't the Premier confront the racism in his own office today? It's 2020. Should you really have a racist on the payroll?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, the journey of reconciliation involves time, commitment, relationship, and opportunity for growth and education. Rather than cancelling people, choosing the path of honest dialogue can actually build trust. Just this last weekend I was on one of the First Nations for a very special ceremony. The elder came to me, and he said with tears in his eyes that I was the first white man to ever attend one of their ceremonies. He said that he'd prayed for me for 54 years to come to them, and he named me a Cree name. What an honour. I'm working hard for reconciliation with the indigenous people.

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, in my constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright people tell me about the havoc that rural crime is having on our community. Crime impacts their homes, it impacts their families, and it impacts their mental health. They constantly worry about their safety and that of their families. They tell me that it takes too long for the police to respond to emergency situations, including simple break and enters. Can the Minister of Justice tell this Assembly what measures this government has taken to help reduce response times in rural Alberta?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, last year we heard loud and clear from Albertans that they wanted to know that someone was coming. When there is an emergency, they want to know that law enforcement is coming. That's why we implemented the RAPID force, so 400 sheriffs could come and respond to emergencies. That training is ongoing right now and should be implemented this fall. We also implemented a historic new police funding model that'll bring 300 new police officers plus 200 support personnel to help us respond to crises across Alberta. We've listened. We're taking action.

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, given that part of our plan to reduce response times is that this government announced a new police funding model for rural Alberta which sees the largest investment in rural policing since the March West and will increase the number

of RCMP boots on the ground from under 1,600 officers to almost 1,900 and given that last week the RCMP announced that 76 new officers will be patrolling rural Alberta over the next year, with the first 25 arriving just last week, can the minister tell this Assembly how this new funding model will enhance public safety for Albertans no matter where you live?

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you to the member for that question, Mr. Speaker. We set up a new committee to help provide oversight for how policing is done in rural Alberta, to make sure that the resources are where they need to be. That's going to put more boots on the ground in rural Alberta. We heard that loud and clear. Three hundred new police officers: the RCMP is dedicated to making sure that they can fulfill that commitment, 76 new police officers this year alone. We've heard loud and clear from Albertans. They've been living in fear for too long. We literally have people living with axes and firearms underneath their beds. That's not acceptable. We've listened. We're taking action.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that last week the RCMP also announced 57 new civilian positions for 2020-21 to support front-line policing in rural Alberta and given that 18 of those civilian positions have already arrived, can the minister inform this Assembly how these positions will be distributed and how they will provide a proper support network to protect Albertans?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, these civilian support positions will allow our police officers to be out there on our streets in our communities. It'll help reduce the burden of paperwork. In many instances you have a police officer that has to drive an hour back to their depot, to their station, maybe to be able to fill out paperwork. By having civilian support, they'll be able to call that in, provide the information. Someone will be able to support them so they can be out in our communities keeping people safe.

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

Premier's Speech Writer's Remarks

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago 14,000 Albertans gathered outside this Legislature to protest against systemic racism. As elected officials all of us need to do better to address racism and all other forms of discrimination, but as of today this Premier is still standing beside his speech writer Paul Bunner, even knowing about the appalling, disgusting transphobic and racist comments he expressed only a few years ago. Will this Premier do the right thing, listen to those impacted and hurt by Paul Bunner's racism, homophobia, and transphobia, and fire him today?

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the huge privileges of being elected and being able to work in this House is the incredible people that you meet over your lifetime and also seeing the evolution of many of the people that you work with over your lifetime. President Obama in a 2008 interview stated that he personally believed that marriage was between a man and a woman and that he was not in favour of gay marriage, and his views evolved during his presidency. It was only in 2013 when Hillary Clinton first expressed support for same-sex marriage. Before that she was against such marriages altogether, and her views evolved.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that these ministers should be ashamed of such a thin fig leaf to cover for this gentleman's bigotry, because given that Paul Bunner wrote in 2016 that Black Lives Matter incites violence and given that that's deeply offensive to the 14,000 people who gathered peacefully at this Legislature under the Black Lives Matter banner and given that by standing by his speech writer, the Premier is endorsing those racist reviews and writings, why is the harm that Paul Bunner has done by degrading and dehumanizing hundreds of thousands of Albertans worth less to this Premier than protecting the job of one bigoted individual?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, we made it clear here on this side of the House that we disagree with what the speech writer said years ago.

But the hon. member has brought up the issue of how recent remarks are. I would ask that side about Gil McGowan, who just a couple of weeks ago called every parent in this province that puts their child in school where they learn faith nutbars. Again, the folks on the other side seem to have two standards, one for people that they like and one for people they don't like. Racism, discrimination are never acceptable, but the members on the other side, while they're talking about how recent remarks are, ought to think of Gil McGowan and his very recent, very offensive remarks. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that they show it to be acceptable as long as they keep that man employed in the Premier's office, because given that Paul Bunner also has a clear history of homophobia and transphobia and given that he's made multiple offensive and revolting comments about LGBTQ and transgender Albertans and given that it's the same speech writer that this Premier is defending as an essential part of his government, to the Premier. This speech writer tried to explain away a murder because the victim was gay. Does the Premier understand the very real harm this caused to actual Albertans, and if so, why does he still refuse to do the right thing and fire Paul Bunner today?

2:10

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I find it very rich, this conversation. It's interesting because the entire NDP Leap Manifesto and everything is based on their NDP icon Tommy Douglas, who said that homosexuality – he said that we ought to recognize it for what it is, a mental illness and a psychiatric condition. Did his views change? I've never yet heard them while I've been in this House ever . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. It's important that the Speaker can hear the answer even if you might not like it.

Mrs. Aheer: It's interesting that they're saying, "Oh, people can change; people can change" yet only on their side. The truth, Mr. Speaker, is that in order to fight racism, we need to do this all together.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton . . . [interjections] Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West will come to order when the Speaker is on his feet.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader has the call.

Alberta Separatism

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is better in Canada than outside of Canada. This is a fact, a fact, sadly, that some members of the government do not share. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat had demanded that separation must be on the agenda. The Member for Red Deer-South referred to these partners and their residents as “hostile, parasitic partners” and attacked the Canadian federation as a rigged partnership. Will the Premier agree that Alberta is stronger in Canada and unequivocally denounce the separatist views coming from his own backbench?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would remind the hon. member that just asked the question that our member that made the remarks about our sister province Quebec actually apologized in this House for those remarks, and I think we all should be grateful that that happened. The Premier has made it very clear that Alberta’s place is in Canada, and our job as a government is to make Alberta stronger within a united Canada and, by so doing, provide better opportunities and a better future for Albertans. It’s where we’ve always been, where we always will be. The other side is not a place for us to take lessons.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it’s not just the Premier’s current colleagues who are embracing separatism and given that the Premier’s former colleague and Stephen Harper’s House leader Jay Hill has taken on the leadership of a separatist party and given that the Premier’s only response to this development has been a joke about the hypocrisy of a separatist taking a federal pension, will the Premier take the time now to finally and unequivocally reject the so-called Wexit party and specifically its new leader, your friend Jay Hill?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the NDP seem completely unable to learn from the past. The fact is that they have a member, Gil McGowan, that has said offensive things in the last couple of weeks. They’ve never distanced themselves away from that. By comparison, our Premier has distanced himself from separatist sentiments. He’s said that Canada needs to include Alberta and a strong Alberta is good for all of Canada. That’s what our government is working to create. That’s what’ll actually make the future better for our children and indeed the older people amongst us, that we stand with Alberta in Canada.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier actually hasn’t distanced himself from separatists because they are still currently in the UCP caucus and given that every single opinion poll shows that the vast majority of Albertans have already rejected separatism and overwhelmingly support Alberta staying within Canada and given that this Premier talks out of both sides of his mouth, claiming he’s a patriot one day but then fanning the flames of separatism the next, to the Premier: will you vote in favour of my motion today to unequivocally denounce separatism, including separatist sentiments coming from the members of your own caucus?

Mr. McIver: Again, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition House Leader is complaining because we allow some of our members to speak what’s in their heart even if it’s not the party’s position. On their

side they actually had a member quit when they were in government because the most important issue in that member’s constituency, which happened to be the bad treatment of people in mobile-home parks – they didn’t allow that hon. member to represent their constituents. On this side of the House we represent all Albertans. We represent the people that sent us here. We don’t have to agree on every single thing, but government policy is a strong Alberta within Canada.

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

Keystone XL Pipeline Project

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans heard something great at the end of last week. We heard the news that the Alberta segment of the Keystone XL pipeline will see construction kick off. This is great news for Alberta workers, who see thousands of well-paying jobs in the midst of an economic crisis created by COVID-19 and the oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia. Despite this, long-time NDP affiliate and supposed worker advocate Gil McGowan has threatened to sabotage the pipeline’s progress by, quote, talking to our American counterparts. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: could you tell us what kind of harm McGowan’s threat would cause to Alberta workers and their families?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last time a single person did this much damage to the economy was when the former Premier of this province stood shoulder to shoulder with Justin Trudeau and said that cancelling Northern Gateway was the right decision. That was never our position. In fact, we’re going to invest \$1.5 billion in Keystone XL. Do you know why we’re going to do that? We’re going to do it because it’s going to create more than 14,000 jobs on the Canadian side of the border. That’s why we’re going to do it.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the associate minister. Given that Keystone XL not only has huge implications for Alberta pipeline workers and their families but also Albertans as a whole and that Keystone XL would mean tens of billions more in the Alberta economy and tens of billions more for public services like schools, hospitals, and social services, to the minister: could you tell us what potential economic impact Mr. McGowan’s sabotaging Keystone XL would have and how much lost revenue it would mean for the government and public services and public-sector workers, which this would help fund?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, it absolutely perplexes me as well as everyone on this side of the House when failed candidate, NDP affiliate Gab McGowan will do whatever he can to defer \$30 billion worth of royalties to this province. You know, the real question we should be asking is: will that caucus stand in this House in front of those cameras and apologize to Albertans for their perverse antienergy tendencies?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the associate minister. Given that Mr. McGowan and his organization are legal affiliates of the Alberta NDP and given that Mr. McGowan has opposed nearly every pipeline project in recent history and that pipelines from Alberta mean jobs for Albertans and long-awaited economic

benefits, to the associate minister: could you tell us why you think an NDP affiliate who claims to be an advocate for Alberta workers would try to convince American pipeline workers to attack the prosperity of their Albertan counterparts, that he supposedly represents?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, Trans Mountain, Northern Gateway, Energy East, Keystone, Keystone XL, and the Alberta Clipper. You know what? Failed NDP candidate Gab McGowan protested against every single one of those pipelines. You know what I guess the real question is? Is that caucus going to condemn Gab McGowan, and is that caucus going to finally acknowledge that Alberta's success is not a partisan issue?

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

Child and Family Benefit

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2019 combined the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit, and the change took effect last week. This means that the new Alberta child and family benefit will offer fewer benefits to more than 165,000 Albertans, and 55,000 Albertans will lose the benefit entirely. Now that families more than ever need more money in their pockets and not less, this government has cut the benefit which helps families put food on the table and care for their children, and it's disgraceful. To the Minister of Finance: how do you justify taking money out of families' household budgets?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta child and family benefit will give more support to approximately 65,000 very low-income Alberta families. By consolidating this benefit, we're putting more money in the pockets of those who are most in need. Alberta will continue to have some of the most generous child benefits in the entire country, and it's estimated that these will go to over 190,000 families each and every year.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the number of Albertans in need is growing every day with this government in place and given that working-class Alberta families will not benefit from this government's multibillion-dollar giveaway to big corporations and given that the corporations that did benefit from that giveaway took their savings and invested them in the U.S. and did not create jobs in Alberta and given that after an unprecedented pandemic that has put more strain on family budgets, we just see more of the same from this UCP government, to the Minister of Finance: given that you have no new ideas to help families, will you at least commit to reversing this change to the child benefit?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, this new approach will save an estimated \$400,000 a year in administration costs and allow us to keep our commitment to protect vulnerable Albertans while living within our means. This will mean up to 15 per cent more for some of the most low-income families in our province. You know what we're doing to support Albertans? We are working to create jobs and get our economy back on track.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these changes to the Alberta child and family benefit will negatively impact the

Alberta families that need this support the most and given that these families need immediate financial support to meet emergency and growing financial costs during this pandemic, will the Minister of Finance commit to meeting with a group of families so they can explain to him the damage that he and the Minister of Children's Services have caused? Minister, I will arrange the meeting myself. You just have to show up.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're always willing to listen to Albertans. That is what we've committed to, and that's what we've been doing over the past year. The new Alberta child and family benefit will help those most in need while living within our means. That is exactly what we heard from Albertans just over one year ago: live within our means, rein in government spending, but get Albertans back to work.

Economic Recovery and Women

Member Irwin: Bridges, heavy-duty construction vehicles, and colourful highway construction plans featured prominently in promotional videos for the UCP's economic recovery, but do you know who wasn't featured? Women. So far, this UCP's so-called plan seems to be a replay of the greatest hits even when we know that this economic recession is different than any before because it's impacting women more than men. To the minister of status of women: have you advocated to your cabinet colleagues to make sure that the government has a clear plan for how women are going to be included in our province's economic recovery? If so, we need you to be specific.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that I think is most important that we state on this side that we won't do is making sure that we attack the very industries that uphold this entire province. That would be manufacturing, that would be agriculture, and that would be oil and gas and all of the ancillary jobs that are created for that and also pay for the public service, which is disproportionately women. The interesting fact is that that member doesn't acknowledge the fact that the very things that she has supported, including activists against oil and gas, have actually impacted women disproportionately because of her behaviour.

Member Irwin: Given that most low-wage workers in Alberta are women and given that this government waffled on its commitment to uphold the \$15 minimum wage, which we know benefits working mothers, and given that workers know that they can't trust this Premier as he has harmed them so many times before, can the Premier tell this House whether he has consulted with any of those low-wage workers about their economic plan, or do you have to be a dude on the donor list to have a seat at this government's table?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, our government is very focused on creating jobs. When you create jobs, it is for all Albertans. I've got to say that nobody hurt women and the number of jobs they had more than the NDP when they were in government, starting with the carbon tax, starting with the tax on business, continuing with the tax on the energy sector, driving investment and jobs out the door. Women in this province have never been hurt as badly as they were when the NDP was in government. We will not repeat those mistakes.

Member Irwin: Given that there can be no economic recovery without child care and given that the government doesn't have a credible plan for either child care or the reopening of schools, can the Minister of Children's Services tell this House how she's going to ensure that working moms, working parents aren't left out of Alberta's economic recovery? We're asking for a whole heck of a lot of Albertans, so please be specific.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What our government is doing is creating jobs and getting our economy back up and running so that Alberta parents can work. What we won't do is take lessons from the members opposite, rehashing old campaign plans that Albertans didn't vote for, for \$25-a-day daycare, that we simply can't afford because Alberta families know that those dollars come from them working hard to earn them.

We will make sure that we have fair, equitable supports. We have among the most generous supports in the country for working parents, Mr. Speaker, as well as our hugely, hugely important early childhood educators.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, technology and innovation is going to be an important sector to the future of our economy. Our government just released our economic recovery plan, a bold document that outlines measures that our government is implementing to spur on economic growth, attract investment, and create jobs across Alberta. As part of that, several measures are being introduced to support the growth of technology and innovation. Can the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism tell us what some of those measures are and whether they support other sectors as well?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As part of the economic recovery plan we are introducing an innovation employment grant, which will make Alberta the most attractive place in Canada to invest in technology and innovation. We are recapitalizing the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, which will provide venture capital to tech start-ups. Technology is not a sector unto itself but grows all sectors. Our world-class agricultural and energy sectors are also grown with investment into technology but also industries such as transportation, manufacturing, health care, education, and many others.

The Speaker: The Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her response. Given that we know that the previous government chased investment out of Alberta by the tens of billions and made us uncompetitive on many levels and given that our government eliminated several programs introduced by the NDP, including tax credit programs, can the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism tell the House why our government eliminated those programs and why our measures are an improvement?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. We eliminated the NDP's tax credits because they were overly bureaucratic and administratively heavy.

The Alberta investor tax credit, for example, didn't have a single approved applicant in the first six months it was open for intake because it was so bureaucratic. As Moodys Gartner tax law, an international tax firm, said, "The AITC and CITC programs developed by the Alberta government are a textbook example of the creation of a program that is overly bureaucratic, ridiculously uncertain . . . and condescending." That's why we got rid of them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that our government is supporting the tech sector through a variety of measures and that one of those, as stated by the minister, is the recapitalizing of Alberta Enterprise Corporation and given that Alberta Enterprise Corporation provides venture capital funding to early-stage Alberta tech companies and helps diversify and grow the economy, can the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism tell us what this funding is going to accomplish?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. We are providing \$175 million to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation in order to make them self-sufficient and to ensure that Alberta's early-stage tech start-ups are getting the venture capital they need to grow. Recapitalizing AEC was a recommendation from the Innovation Capital Working Group, and we will be releasing their report shortly. The funding is estimated to create up to 4,000 jobs, and for every dollar of funding that AEC invests in venture capital funds, they leverage on average \$4 from the private sector.

Canadian Energy Centre

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, the international embarrassment that is the Premier's energy war room reached a new low this weekend. At a time when thousands of Albertans are struggling with the impact of COVID and the economic crisis, the war room is using \$82,000 a day to sponsor and promote climate change denial on social media. Will the minister of environment join me in calling on the war room to stop using the money that Albertans give them to promote climate change conspiracy theories, and if he can't, is it because he actually agrees with them?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, it's rich to hear anything from the members opposite with respect to our energy sector. Let's talk about their friend Mr. Gil McGowan of the AFL, a known close ally of the NDP, who threatened to hold up construction of KXL. Maybe it's time for the NDP to support Alberta's energy sector instead of consistently failing to stand up for Canada's single largest subsector. Canadian energy is a part of the answer in addressing climate change and shifting to a lower carbon society. Canada's energy producers have some of the highest environmental, social, and governance standards in the world, and our government is proud of them.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given that the minister just admitted that she's proud of the climate change denying ads that they're running on social media and given that the ad in question is still running and given that promoting climate change denial conspiracies is just another in a long list of failures from a war room more famous for stealing logos than promoting our energy sector, doesn't the minister think that it's time to shut down this joke of an organization

and maybe find a use for its \$30 million annual budget that doesn't embarrass Alberta?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, let's not forget what kind of actions the members opposite took during their short time in office. They appointed the likes of Tzeporah Berman and Ed Whittingham, known opponents of the energy sector, to places like the Alberta Energy Regulator, and we just witnessed a close friend of the NDP, Gil McGowan, threaten to hold up construction of KXL. I wonder how the thousands of unionized workers across Canada and the U.S. set to work on the megaproject feel about this. Canada needs to advocate its energy sector around the world. We protect civil liberties, we appropriately regulate industry, and we are world leaders in innovation.

2:30

Mr. Schmidt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that you can't on one hand say that you're world leaders in environmental protection and fund climate change denying ads at the same time and given that this government continues to stand beside this \$82,000-a-day embarrassment and defend it even as its incompetence impairs Alberta's energy industry's ability to compete and given that climate change is real and requires real action to tackle despite what the war room is spending tax dollars to try and tell Canadians, can the minister explain why she's letting war room director Tom Olsen and his band of climate change denying nitwits hurt our energy industry? Will she at least agree with me that Tom Olsen should be fired immediately?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite likes to talk about embarrassment. What's an embarrassment is that under their government they sat behind their desks for four years raising taxes, driving billions of dollars in investment out of this province, and their members actively protested against our energy sector. I'll remind the House that a close ally of the NDP, a supposed supporter of good-paying, unionized jobs, threatened to slow down and delay a project that would employ thousands of workers he supposedly represents. It's a complete shame that the member opposite and his colleagues just don't support an industry that is leading the world in innovation to address the internationally growing demand for energy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Rural Access to Postsecondary Education

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's First Nations colleges offer quality adult learning opportunities. They also provide cultural supports that are key to both academic achievement and personal well-being. Colleges such as Blue Quills, Red Crow, Old Sun have had a harder time than most making the switch to online learning due to COVID-19. Can the minister please outline what, if anything, he has done to support these colleges so that they can provide effective online learning?

The Speaker: The hon. Advanced Education minister has risen.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Indeed, many of the issues that he highlights are real and issues that have been expressed to me in many of my conversations with leaders in our First Nations communities and our First Nation colleges, so we're working with them to find a number of effective solutions. Of course, we know, as per the discussions I've had with some of those leaders, that many students at those First Nation

colleges have challenges in terms of Internet connectivity and accessing proper equipment, so we're working with those colleges and those individuals to find a solution that will work.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that earlier this year Grande Prairie Regional College announced that it would cut 85 positions, suspend two programs next year, thereby putting the pursuit of university status in jeopardy, and given that the college in High Prairie has a very strategic focus on First Nations and Métis students, creates a safe and local place for students to attend college, and was cut as well, can the minister tell us exactly what he hopes these cuts to rural colleges might accomplish, or is he just waiting for the McKinsey report to give him the go-ahead to shut them down entirely?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, as members of this Assembly will know, as I've mentioned many times in the past, we have one of the most expensive postsecondary systems in the entire country. In these difficult financial and economic times it's imperative and prudent that we're more diligent with taxpayer dollars. We're working with institutions to encourage them to generate revenue from other sources. But at the same time as well, Mr. Speaker, we believe that we can do so while not sacrificing access and quality opportunities. There are many innovative ways to deliver postsecondary education, and we'll continue working with the postsecondary community to achieve that.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that indigenous students are much less likely to attend postsecondary institutions, whether it be universities, colleges, polytechnics, trades, due to systemic barriers and given that the government has a responsibility to ensure that higher education is accessible to all Albertans regardless of where they live or their ability to pay, why is this government cutting colleges like Portage in Lac La Biche, Keyano in Fort Mac, Northern Lakes in High Prairie, three examples of Alberta colleges that serve First Nations and Métis populations very well, at least before they got cut?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, it's a little rich. Obviously, these are legitimate concerns that the member is raising. We must do everything we can to ensure equitable access opportunities for all Albertans, including members of our indigenous communities. However, for the last four years the members opposite sat on this side, in government, and did zero to increase postsecondary participation, so it's rich for them to talk about participation rates when, after four years of their policies, nothing worked. As the member knows, we are working to develop a future vision for postsecondary education to help address some of these systemic problems.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mask Distribution

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June 20 million masks were distributed through restaurant partners, municipalities, long-term care facilities, First Nations, and Métis settlements as well as other organizations. This was a highly successful initiative that experienced a high participation rate. To the Minister of Health: when will the second distribution of nonmedical masks be available to my constituents in Airdrie-Cochrane and all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the first phase of the free mask distribution in Alberta was a huge success. In three

weeks over 20 million masks were distributed across Alberta. The next 20 million are ready to go, and distribution through our restaurant partners is ready to start on July 13. We're excited to be able to announce further details in the coming days.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Minister. Given that our government chose to use restaurant partners to distribute masks, considering that 95 per cent of Albertans live within 10 kilometres of at least one of those partners, and given that not all Albertans have the ability to receive masks through a drive-through service, to the same minister: can you inform Albertans of other ways that they can get one of these nonmedical masks?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. Some Albertans are unable to pick up a mask at a drive-through. That's why we're also resupplying masks to a number of other partners that were involved in the first distribution: municipalities, especially those without easy access to a restaurant partner location; First Nations; Métis settlements; places of worship; transit services province-wide, including Calgary and Edmonton; seniors' organizations; women's shelters; homeless shelters; addiction treatment centres; and other organizations that have highlighted for us the need for masks.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you again, Minister. Given that Albertans by and large have demonstrated great personal responsibility throughout this pandemic and given that there have been a few people who have chosen not to and given that during phase 1 some Albertans were reporting that they were getting 40 masks at a time, to the minister: what is being done to ensure that those who need a mask are able to get one?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To ensure that we have masks available for those in need, masks will continue to be handed out in bundles of four. Free mask distribution is on the honour system, as it was before, and we're asking Albertans to take only what they need. The program is meant to supplement a person's own efforts to acquire nonmedical masks. We're the only province in Canada to take this important step to help limit the spread of COVID through our province, and I want to thank all Albertans for doing their part to keep each other safe, to keep our families safe, to keep our first responders safe as we continue with stage 2 of the relaunch.

Economic Recovery and Job Creation

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, our province is currently experiencing a hardship like no other in recent history. Many Albertans are feeling the effects of the worst economic conditions in nearly a century, and they are looking for hope on the horizon. The government's recent announcement of Alberta's recovery plan includes grants and capital funding for research, technology, and innovation. To the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism: how many new jobs is this funding expected to create?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As I mentioned previously, our government is providing \$175 million to recapitalize the Alberta Enterprise

Corporation, which is estimated to create up to 4,000 jobs in Alberta's technology sector. For every dollar that AEC invests, they leverage \$4 from the private sector into Alberta's tech companies. We're also creating an innovation employment grant, which will make Alberta the most attractive place to invest in tech and in the innovation sector. Tech and innovation are not only sectors unto themselves but grow all sectors, particularly energy and agriculture but also transportation, manufacturing, and others.

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta's unemployment rate has increased drastically this year alone due to the pandemic and low energy prices and given that many components of the recovery plan will take time to be effective, to the same minister: what parts of the recovery plan will create jobs in the short term, and will those programs be able to support future employment opportunities?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. A key element of our government's economic recovery plan is to create tens of thousands of jobs right now through our acceleration of the job-creation tax cut and \$10 billion in projects that will move people from unemployment to good jobs right now, building roads, bridges, overpasses, water projects, pipelines, gas lines, schools, hospitals, long-term care homes for seniors, drug treatment centres, tourism infrastructure, and much more. We're also creating 7,400 jobs by moving forward with construction of the Keystone XL pipeline through our investment of \$1.5 billion.

2:40

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta's oil and gas industry already leads the way in research and development and given that global demand for natural gas is expected to increase dramatically in coming years and given that the recovery plan places emphasis on economic diversification, to the associate minister of natural gas: what role will the oil and gas industry, specifically natural gas, play in the economic recovery plan of our province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand in this House and report that the natural gas industry is going to play a key role in Alberta's economic recovery. In fact, it's going to lead the way in diversification with exciting things like turning Alberta into a world-class destination for pet-chem facilities, implementing a hydrogen strategy, getting LNG to global markets, as well as advanced plastic recycling. We said that we're going to get Albertans back to work, and that's what we're going to do.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has a member's statement to make.

Premier's Speech Writer's Remarks on Residential Schools

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I never ignore our First Nations: this was said by the Premier in regard to the calls from First Nations groups who have called for the Premier to fire his racist speech writer. This call for the firing of an employee whose salary is paid by taxpayers is the bare minimum this Premier can do in regard to reconciliation. By employing an individual who has called the residential school system a "bogus genocide," the Premier is contradicting his commitment to reconciliation with indigenous peoples. To turn a blind eye to a top adviser in the Premier's office who has shown profound disrespect through hateful remarks to Canadians demonstrates the Premier's inability to understand how reconciliation should look and sound.

The Premier has stated that he speaks for the Alberta government and not Paul Bunner, but he is wilfully ignoring that Paul Bunner writes for his government. This Premier is accountable for the people who work for him. He cannot minimize Mr. Bunner's actions. This is not a matter of debate. He should be fired.

Paul Bunner had written a series of hateful columns from the 1990s to 2016, and he continues to evade accountability for the words he wrote and the thoughts he shared. These articles are possibly one of the highest disgraces for a government official. Paul Bunner has attempted to minimize and discount one of the greatest atrocities committed by governments in our country. Whether or not he still is writing on these horrible tragedies, it does not absolve him from the hateful views he wrote, especially when the members of marginalized communities he spoke about have yet to receive an apology.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier must do better.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is rising with a member's statement.

Salons against Domestic Abuse

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every Albertan deserves to feel safe. COVID-19 saw those that suffer from domestic violence isolated at home with their abusers in an environment of uncertainty and elevated stress. Many victims are afraid of telling their story and unsure of where to turn to ask for help.

A salon owner in my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville brought a program to my attention called salons against domestic abuse. Many abused women will hesitate to call the police or go to a shelter, but they will talk about the abuse with somebody that they trust. A salon professional who sees a client regularly can often spot potential warning signs of abuse. Maybe it's unusual, unexplained bruising or cuts in the hairline or scalp at different stages of healing. Maybe it's the continual bruises explained away by awkward excuses like, "I'm so clumsy." Sometimes it's a partner that always accompanies a client to her appointments or waits outside in the parking lot or perhaps a change in character where a client seems sad, lonely, withdrawn, and afraid. One person that I spoke with advised that she alone had five disclosures of abuse since the relaunch of hair salons on May 14.

Salon professionals may not be counsellors or domestic violence experts, but they can make a difference in a victim's life by responding respectfully, sensitively, and supportively when they recognize warning signs of abuse.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, it is important that victims of abuse know that there is help available and they are not alone. The government of Alberta has a 24-hour helpline in place where victims of family violence can get help anonymously in more than 170 languages by dialing 310-1818.

Those looking to get to safety and start a new life can meet with Alberta Supports and apply for help with the planning and the associated costs. The first step to getting help is being able to talk about the abuse, and salon professionals can be that friendly place.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to present a petition with 3,203 signatures from 49 Alberta cities and towns. The petitioners "urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation to require mandatory reporting by physicians of medically unfit drivers."

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If you could place it in the tabling basket for us upon completion of the Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 32, Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, sponsored by the Minister of Labour and Immigration; also Bill 33, Alberta Investment Attraction Act, sponsored by the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism; and Bill 34, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, sponsored by the Minister of Environment and Parks.

I would also like to provide oral notice of Government Motion 29 in the Premier's name.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) affirm its loyalty to a united Canadian Federation, and
- (b) urge the government to obtain a fair deal for Alberta within the Canadian Federation.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I will move a motion pursuant to Standing Order 42. Would you like me to read it out now?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to propose the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm its commitment to a strong, united Canada that is indivisible, acknowledge that it is unquestionably in Alberta's interest to remain a part of the Canadian Federation and that there could be a detrimental economic and fiscal impact to Alberta and Albertans if the province separated from the Canadian Federation, and unequivocally denounce calls for Alberta to become a state that is independent of Canada.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Bill 30 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

The act would amend nine pieces of health legislation to strengthen our public health care system and improve people's access to the health services that they need. If passed, the Health Statutes Amendment Act will help us meet our commitment to ensuring that all Albertans have access to quality, person-centred health services in a more sustainable and efficient manner. These proposed amendments will provide Albertans with more voice and oversight into how to strengthen and improve health services as we move forward.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 30, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings?

I have a tabling. I have the requisite six copies of a report of an investigation under the Conflicts of Interest Act from the office of the Ethics Commissioner, and I table it now.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Labour and Immigration, pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act the Workers' Compensation Board Alberta 2019 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the last time we met, the House heard a point of privilege, and the Government House Leader elected to defer the opportunity to respond to that point of privilege. I understand that the Deputy Government House Leader and the Minister of Transportation will do so on behalf of the government now.

Privilege Misleading the House

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing the government the opportunity to respond to the allegations made by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods about a potential breach of privilege made by the Minister of Finance and the Premier with regard to remarks made during Oral Question Period.

First of all, I will say at the outset that having read the remarks made by the Minister of Finance and the Premier and the arguments put forward by the Official Opposition, I do not believe there has been a prima facie breach of privilege for misleading the Assembly. The crux of the arguments from the opposition is that the answers in question period gave the opposition the impression that the Auditor General's office approached the government about delaying the release of the 2019-20 annual reports. In none of the questions that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods cited does the Minister of Finance or the Premier say that the Auditor General approached the government seeking to delay the 2019-20 annual reports. It should be noted that just because Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition is confused, it doesn't mean that a misleading statement has been made.

The Minister of Finance answered a question on May 27 and said, "We've heard from the Auditor General that – publicly the Auditor General has made the statement that they're concerned that they would not be able to actually complete their audit work." The minister is referring quite clearly to public statements made by the Auditor General on their website. This statement from March 19 reads in part:

As we collectively face the task of containing the COVID-19 pandemic in Alberta, like all organizations, the Office of the Auditor General is assessing and managing the implications to both our people and our ability to continue to fulfill our legislated mandate.

Now, having read that statement and others, perhaps it is no surprise that the Premier would answer a question on June 22 with the statement: "The Auditor General has indicated that their office is not in a position, because of the pandemic, to produce a report according to the normal schedule."

Now, I understand that the Auditor General has provided assurances that they were prepared to produce a report according to the normal schedule, and that is no surprise because the Auditor General and his staff do fantastic work on behalf of all Albertans. However, it was also reasonable to assume that given the amount of challenges faced because of the global pandemic, it would be acceptable to pursue options to delay the annual reports.

As an aside, I note that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is concerned somehow that there is less scrutiny of annual reports if they are released on August 31 than if they are released on June 30. Perhaps the implication is that the Official Opposition is nowhere to be found at the end of August. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that this government will continue to work on delivering the mandate received from Albertans no matter what day or what time of year it is.

I also refer you to remarks made by the Minister of Finance during the third reading debate of Bill 24, the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2020. The minister was concerned when he heard that members of the opposition were confused from the question period exchanges, so he sought to provide further clarity. The remarks I want to highlight are found on page 1680 of *Hansard* for June 25, 2020.

Like the broader public sector and Albertans all across the province, the office of the Auditor General adjusted their normal course of operations. They issued a number of news releases on the topic. They decided to close their Edmonton and Calgary offices, cease on-site audits as well as meetings with audit entities. We implemented similar changes across the government of Alberta . . . Government is comprised of 171 reporting entities. Those 171 entities are made up of additional entities. AHS itself represents approximately 80 entities, and the Ministry of Health represents by far the largest budget of any individual ministry in the government. Most of those entities are audited by the Auditor General, and the Controller and individual ministries work very closely with our Auditor General in the undertaking and completion of that work. In other words, we knew that ministries and especially the Ministry of Health would be hard-pressed to complete work on their annual report given the need to divert significant resources to the public health emergency. That in turn meant that information essential to the work of the Auditor General would be delayed, and the work of the Auditor General could then in turn be delayed. That was the basis of our discussion with him.

Perhaps the members opposite are suggesting that we should have diluted our response to the pandemic, but I respectfully disagree. Madam Speaker, I want to be clear that the intent of our comments has consistently been to underline that our decision to seek an extension to the deadline for the annual report for 2019-2020 was based on consultation with our

partners. To be clear, this was a government decision based on consultation with the office of the Auditor General.

I apologize for the length of that quotation, Mr. Speaker, but given that the Minister of Finance is one of the ones being impugned by the opposition and he isn't able to rise today to defend himself, I felt it was important to contribute his own words to the matter under discussion.

Now, as the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods mentioned in her speech, there is a three-part test to be found when allegations are made about a member misleading the Assembly. The test can be found on pages 653 to 654 of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*. The three parts of the test are as follows: one, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; two, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was incorrect; and three, that in making the statement the member intends to mislead the House.

I have provided clarity in the words of the Minister of Finance to illustrate why the remarks made by the Premier and the minister are not misleading. The government has never made any statement that the Auditor General requested legislative options to delay the 2019-20 annual reports. That decision was made entirely by government but, certainly, in consultation with the office of the Auditor General.

Points 2 and 3 don't even need to be refuted, but the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods refers to an e-mail she subsequently tabled. In that e-mail the Auditor General's office confirms that the decision to extend the reporting period was made by the government. She doesn't actually provide proof for point 3, that in making the statement the member intends to mislead the House. The Minister of Finance or the Premier has nowhere said that they intended to make any misleading statements to the House. I would point out that *Beauchesne's* 494 states the following. "It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted."

Finally, I also have some issues with the antics of the Official Opposition whereby they bring forward this point of privilege crying wolf, but then when it came time to debate Bill 24, which contained the provisions about moving the dates for the release of the annual reports, the opposition couldn't be bothered to put up more than a single, solitary speaker in debate. If you can only get one speaker out of a 24-member caucus to speak, then I don't know if you're doing your job as the Official Opposition. I mean, I see that Bill 24 was the last item of business called on Thursday, and the Assembly adjourned early, so maybe the Official Opposition just wanted to go home instead of doing their jobs and debating legislation.

To me, Mr. Speaker, this looks less like a breach of parliamentary privilege and more like prime political theatre from an opposition still angry with Albertans for being fired in the last provincial election.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as everyone will know, points of privilege are serious matters. Having only just heard the government's arguments, I will take time to consider both sets of arguments that have been made before the Assembly and report back to the Assembly at my convenience.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West trying to get my attention. I'm not sure what the intent would be.

Ms Phillips: Pardon me, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if there is an opportunity to provide additional information.

The Speaker: I would say that it's unusual to provide additional information. Typically speaking, one side of the House has their

opportunity to provide their remarks, which the Official Opposition did the last time we met, and now we've heard from the government. I would suggest that if there was new information that you'd like to provide, that could be done, but then, of course, that would provide additional opportunity for the government, having only just heard the arguments presented – they may take some more time and thus delay the decision of the point of privilege. I'll leave it in your hands. If you feel like it's new and relevant, I am happy to hear, but I will provide the government the same opportunity.

3:00

Ms Phillips: Thank you for that indulgence, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to be corrected – I could be wrong – but often if there's new information that arises since we last met, I wanted to ensure that the Speaker had the opportunity to add it to the deliberations. It has come to light since our Chamber last convened. It's a little bit complicated, but let me see if I can get through it fairly quickly.

We do have a question of privilege before the House; however, with what has been reported in media over the constituency break week, we have seen additional information about breaches of statute and privilege, and this has to do with the production of financial documents that are legally required, so I'd like to add this to the Speaker's deliberations in terms of what has to . . .

The Speaker: I hate to interrupt. Is this with respect to the heritage trust fund?

Ms Phillips: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. That may be a point of privilege. I have no idea. It would certainly be a separate point of privilege to the one that is currently before the House. If you would like to raise that, you could do so during the typical means of raising a point of privilege, but certainly this would not be in addition to the information that we've had before the Assembly.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Motions under Standing Order 42

Alberta Separatism

Ms Sweet:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm its commitment to a strong, united Canada that is indivisible, acknowledge that it is unquestionably in Alberta's interest to remain a part of the Canadian Federation and that there could be a detrimental economic and fiscal impact to Alberta and Albertans if the province separated from the Canadian Federation, and unequivocally denounce calls for Alberta to become a state that is independent of Canada.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand again on Standing Order 42 in regard to the motion that I read out earlier this afternoon, affirming to commit to a strong and united Canada that is indivisible, acknowledge that it is unquestionable and in Alberta's interest to remain as part of Canada's federation, and that, of course, there could be detrimental economic and fiscal impacts.

Now, I recognize that right now I'm speaking only to the urgency of the matter and not to the debate of the actual SO 42. I will try to be brief to allow for the unanimous consent to move forward. I would like to encourage all members to, however, vote unanimously to allow this debate to occur.

As we just saw, the Deputy Government House Leader just stood up and put Government Motion 29 on the floor, which conveniently has similar wording to the motion that I have put on the floor. This seems to be a trend in regard to the government actually acknowledging that there tends to be urgency around many of the

SO 42s that the opposition brings forward with a tweak of a little bit of language to make it their own. So I appreciate and actually take the compliment from the Government House Leader around the urgency of this matter.

Again, I stand pursuant to Standing Order 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a motion in regard to a matter that is urgent. Why is it urgent, and why is it pressing, Mr. Speaker? After our federal election we began to notice talk of separation of the west from Canada. On Canada's 153rd birthday, to be exact, it was seen that there continues to be conversations around the Wexit movement. This has become more pressing than ever as we continue to see that Jay Hill, the former Harper House leader, is now the head of Wexit in the federal party. The Premier has not condemned this and, in fact, has fed into the uncertainty of the future of Alberta with ongoing conversations around the CPP, which we actually saw on the weekend is now being referred to as the APP.

This is urgent because, of course, we recognize that many job creators want certainty in the economics of the province. They don't want short-term decisions; they want long-term decisions. If they don't know what the long-term decisions are for Alberta because there is continuation of talk of referendums and separation and referendums on a topic of different issues and then, of course, the government introduces new pieces of legislation two weeks ago, prior to our break, around their ability to call a referendum on any topic that they choose and since hearing of more referendums and the fact that there may be citizen-led referendums, it creates significant uncertainty in the economic future of the province.

Again, in the time of COVID-19 we've seen that the federal government actually stepped up and helped Alberta substantially when it came to addressing many of the issues that have happened. We are currently still in COVID-19, and the conversation, again, around separatism and the fact that, you know, we see members of the backbench within the UCP talking about separatism. Most recently we saw the hon. member in the *Medicine Hat News* talking about his disappointment about the fact that the NDP is concerned, about the fact that we even want to talk about there being a separation in Alberta. Again, the conversation continues.

We've also seen the hon. Member for Red Deer-South as recently as this month talking about Quebec and the relationship that Quebec has with the federation and how it's impacting Alberta. We only need to actually look at Quebec to see the negative impacts that separation has had in regard to the economy in relation to Alberta.

We've heard the Premier talk about the acceleration and, of course, the corporate taxes and the new legislation that may be coming forward and trying to do investment attraction corporations. Again, the more we hear about separation, the more concerns Albertans are having.

Of course, there's lots of urgency around this issue, because the reality of it is that we have a significant unemployment rate in this province. We have Albertans who are seriously concerned about the future and the economic growth of this province. We continuously talk about pipelines and having to get them out to tidewater, yet there's separation in this province. There are ongoing economic conversations that continue in this province on a daily basis, yet we see a government who refuses to condemn the idea of separatism, won't stand up and actually say that we need to work collaboratively with the federal government, and, in fact, continues to, at any opportune time, discuss and attack the federal government.

Again, I would really encourage all members of this House to maybe just work with the opposition, support unanimous consent on Standing Order 42 instead of writing your own government

motions that pretty much say the same thing that you can then debate on a different day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a nondebatable motion. As such, unanimous consent is required in order to proceed to debate the motion.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: I appreciate the Official Opposition's vigour for a division. However, this is a request for unanimous consent, and there is some member of the Assembly who chose not to provide consent. There is no opportunity for a division. However, on an SO 30 there may be, but perhaps we will sort that out in the future.

Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West has the call.

Police Services

506. Mr. Ellis moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage more effective communication and collaboration between police services operating in Alberta for the purposes of identifying criminal operations, reducing incidence of crime, and creating safer communities for all Albertans.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on Motion 506, which I'm very humbled to bring forward to this Assembly. I know that I'm afforded about 10 minutes here and could probably speak, certainly, for much longer on this particular topic. I know many of you in this Chamber are certainly aware of my background. I was in law enforcement for about 12 years with the Calgary Police Service. During that time I had quite an extensive history with various jobs, identifying many issues, we'll say, within the Calgary Police Service in order to better provide service to the citizens within Calgary.

One of those issues actually had to do with ineffective communication that I perceived to be going on between jurisdictions. What that means is that sometimes I think there's a public perception, Mr. Speaker, that all police services are working collaboratively and that they're all communicating effectively. Sadly, that really is not entirely the case. Things that are going on in Calgary, Edmonton is unaware of. Things that are going on just outside of Calgary – the jurisdictions such as Airdrie and Okotoks may not be aware of what's going on and vice versa. They're having issues communicating between the jurisdictions. Police services are not effectively communicating with each other, and this is, of course, contrary to, we'll say, the public perception. When they are not effectively communicating, that is what creates what is called a revolving-door justice system.

3:10

I know that a lot of people like to talk about that, so what does that really, truly mean? Well, let me just give you an example, Mr. Speaker. You have the accused, hypothetically – we'll just use hypothetically – within Calgary, who commits a crime. Let's just use a very simple crime such as a theft. If they commit that theft and then, based upon what are known as the primary, secondary, tertiary grounds, it's determined by that police officer that that person should be released, they release that person on a promise to

appear. Well, what happens is, again hypothetically, that that person could then go into another jurisdiction. Let's use the east side of Calgary as an example. Then if they cross the border into, we'll call it, RCMP territory, they can go and commit another crime. Well, quite frankly, the new police officer, who just came into contact with that person, has no idea that that person may have been released only hours previously on a different form of release.

What does that mean, Mr. Speaker? Well, under what I mentioned – primary, secondary, and tertiary grounds – police officers, in their report, need to determine whether the person has a likelihood that they're going to attend court. That would be the primary grounds. The secondary grounds would be the likelihood that that person would reoffend. The tertiary grounds would be: would the administration of justice come into disrepute if that person was to be released into the public? Really, it's actually quite challenging for that officer. If that officer does not have the necessary communication and information required to effectively make that decision, that's when you have people being released into the public that should never be released into the public.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

As an example, the Canadian police information centre, which is commonly known as CPIC – people don't know this – quite often can be a year and a half behind on the input of that data into that system. What does that mean? What that means is that when the police officer is assessing whether or not to release that person and then they find out, "Well, it looks like you've been fairly good for at least the last year and a half," that may contribute to having that person released on a promise to appear as opposed to taking that person down in front of a justice of the peace, which may determine a different form of release, which could be anything from a cash bail to a no-deposit own recognizance and, of course, eventually a detention in custody.

Now, that being said, if the officers do not have that critical piece of information, then how can they effectively make a decision whether or not somebody should be released or detained into custody? If we go back to Officer Wynn, who was murdered up in St. Albert, the big controversy at that particular time was: why was that person released onto the streets? Well, sometimes it has to do with the lack of proper communication and information that the bail hearing officer had received in order to present that case to the justice of the peace. Now, I don't know all the intricacies of that case, nor did I investigate it in any way. Maybe the justice of the peace made a decision even though they had that information, but that's beside the point, and that is a totally different issue. The point is that without the necessary and proper information, you tend to make poor decisions, so that's why effective communication is so important.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to add – I know it's already been six minutes now, and I only have four minutes here. I want to bring the attention of this Chamber to something that was called API3. Back in 2006 a fellow police officer who was the Solicitor General, a Calgary Police Service officer by the name of Harvey Cenaiko, put into place this API3 program because he understood the importance of communication amongst multijurisdictions throughout the province. I wish I could tell you that this was an investment that yielded great returns, but it didn't. It cost the taxpayers \$80 million, and as a result of it, we got nothing in return.

You may want to know why this happened. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you why this happened from an insider baseball perspective as somebody that was there in the Calgary Police Service at that time. It really had to do with ego. All police services I know, all of them, including Calgary – it's no different – think that they're the

best. The people in those police services need to check their egos and understand what is in the best interest of the public. That is what is the most important, and that's what did not happen here.

Mr. Speaker, the API3 program, really, it was something that was meant – Solicitor General Harvey Cenaiko in 2016: this was supposed to be a leap forward in how police collect and share intelligence. Information about criminal convictions, pending charges, and warrants had long been shared through the national CPIC program, the Canadian police information centre database, but it wasn't shared in Alberta, at least not to the extent that the public believed it was being shared. And one of the most – the first to pull out of that program was the Edmonton Police Service, citing reasons that they just didn't want to continue with it any longer, but, really, the biggest barrier and why we weren't effectively communicating was the RCMP. The RCMP was reluctant to participate from the beginning. They were guarded in giving their local counterparts in Alberta access to its records.

Well, if you don't give access to other policing jurisdictions, then, yes, you are going to have this revolving-door justice system if you are not effectively communicating. I have said this many times in this House, and I've said it to many of the members outside of this Chamber: in order to have a successful operation, you must effectively communicate. If we have egos within policing jurisdictions that are not allowing to even effectively communicate amongst their own organizations, then of course we're going to have these loopholes within the system, of course we're going to have this revolving-door justice system that has been plaguing rural Alberta, Calgary, Edmonton, and all over not just Alberta but Canada.

There are answers to this, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that there is a government in place that is going to listen. I challenge this government to close these loopholes. The answers are there. The answers to these questions occurred in 2006, when Calgary Police Service officer Harvey Cenaiko and Solicitor General gave the answers to the test. Now all police services in Alberta must check their egos, and they must understand and do what is in the best interest of the people of Alberta. That is how we are going to fix this justice system, that is how we're going to stop the revolving-door justice, and that is how we are going to help the citizens of this province.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to debate on this.

The Acting Speaker: Are there members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the motion brought forward that says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage more effective communication and collaboration between police services operating in Alberta for the purposes of identifying criminal operations, reducing incidence of crime, and creating safer communities for all Albertans.

I agree wholeheartedly that better communication between police services will absolutely help combat crime, and I support this motion.

In doing so, we know that we need to properly resource the services that are going to be required, and at a time when this government has made cuts everywhere due to their failed \$4.7 billion corporate handout, it's concerning about how this will be effectively resourced. I think that there needs to be a really, really strong message to the government that Albertans are talking about policing right now in the province, and we're calling on government and police agencies and services across the province to look at their

policing policies, and Albertans are asking for reform to policing policies. I think this motion is absolutely a great first step in achieving safer communities all across the province, reduce crime, but I think that more needs to be done.

I can speak first-hand to the wonderful relationships that I've had as a professional working with police in the province of Alberta, with RCMP all across Canada as well as the FBI from the United States when working in Children's Services, and communication in all levels, all multidisciplinary teams has been absolutely essential. When we look at Children's Services working with police, there's often a joint plan on how to best support a family and to identify if a crime has been committed. Sometimes that can be easily resolved within the Edmonton police or whatever jurisdiction the family is from, but oftentimes there needs to be that net cast a little bit wider to look at other jurisdictions across the province and perhaps across Canada and sometimes into the U.S. Having really effective, clear communication strategies is an essential piece of that.

3:20

I've been very fortunate to work with officers who have been incredibly helpful, open to working through the best case, when we're supporting families and looking at getting the bad guy, but I know that there are some barriers. Having the government step forward and say that this is something important, I think, is an incredible first step. We need to look at ways that the police can do their job effectively, that they can share information in an appropriate and timely manner. We need to be able to ensure that they have the technology that's needed to be able to do that. I know that sometimes when we're looking at the resources that they have to respond to rural crime, there might be some barriers when it comes to issuing warrants remotely, those types of concerns. Having enhanced technology and communication might alleviate some of those unintended barriers that are unfortunately out there across the province.

Looking at this motion, I would encourage all members to say: absolutely yes. This is something that we can get behind and support. We see that it's important that Albertans feel safe in their communities. I agree with the member when he said that he doesn't think the majority of Albertans understand that there are these information-sharing issues. They expect that when they report a crime, that all of the different policing units are talking to each other. Unfortunately, that's not always the case. Being able to support it is something I think is really important.

I really hope that this is the start of a conversation that would encourage the minister to look at the Police Act as a whole and take into account some of the recommendations that have come from Albertans about having third-party investigations occurring when there are police allegations instead of having the police look at them internally. I think that when we're talking about policing, it's something that's definitely in the forefront of Albertans' minds right now, considering what's happening around the world, quite frankly. Being able to respond to some of those asks I think is essential, and we know that a big part of that is listening to Albertans and what their ideas are.

When we're talking about communication, I would hope that part of what this government does when they're looking at revamping policing in the province is to have consultations. When we were government, we absolutely went to the RCMP to talk about a strategy for rural crime reduction. They're the experts, like the hon. member said. You need to talk to police about what's happening in their jurisdictions to get the best kind of solutions, to talk to Albertans that are experiencing concern and fear in their communities because of what they interpret as a high-crime area as well as potentially not the type of police response that they were

hoping for. I think a consultation needs to occur to discuss what further steps need to be taken.

I know that this is absolutely an incredible first step and it's a conversation starter for communication, and I really hope that government is listening and can see that this is just the first step, that there is a bigger picture when it comes to policing in the province and a bigger conversation that needs to be had, inclusive of all Albertans around the province, to hear what their experience has been, to hear what their concerns have been as well as what their solutions could be. I think we have a beautiful province here that has a lot of insight and awareness and a real desire to make sure that Alberta is a safe community that has reduced crime in its communities. Knowing that there's a step forward by this member to increase effective communication and collaboration is very promising.

I would just encourage all members of the House to support this motion and continue to press government for further action and further steps to be taken when it comes to looking at policing in the province.

You know, I'm concerned about some of the decisions that the government made when it came to taking the costs of resourcing police and downloading them onto our municipalities. Taking money from the victims of crime fund to put into policing is concerning, and I heard from many individuals across the province with concerns about that. Why are they doing these things? When they say that safety in the province is important, why aren't they putting in the resources that are effectively going to actually reduce crime in the province and support victims of crime? We stood in this House and debated at length about the importance of maintaining the victims of crime fund and ensuring that it actually gets to those that support victims. Unfortunately, the government didn't listen to our amendments and took the bill as it was written despite pleas from many that work in the victims' services field as well as survivors of crime.

I hope that when it comes to policing in our province, they'll listen to Albertans and what their concerns are because it's a system that, unfortunately, has not been as effective as it could be. There are many areas that need improvement, and I think communication is an incredible first start. I think that having the words "effective communication and collaboration" is a great first step. When we talk about that, it needs to be inclusive of all Albertans, with minorities at the table, with survivors at the table, with those individuals that aren't just from the policing communities but those impacted by crime, individuals from all across – whether it's the city of Calgary, like the member mentioned; the city of Edmonton, which has been my experience, but also including all of rural Alberta – to have their voice as to what would help them feel safer in their communities, and not just feel safer, but actually to be able to report that this was what was done, this is how it's being supported, and the outcome will be a safer community for all Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to basically wrap up my comments and say that, you know, I thank the member for bringing this motion forward. It's my pleasure to support it. I hope that this is an indication of a first step to move forward to support a crime-reduced province and support for all of those that are impacted by crime.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has risen to debate.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former police officer, just like my hon. colleague from Calgary-West, I have

experienced first-hand the issues of law enforcement agencies. In regard to intelligence sharing and effective communication, he has his experience with interagency communication in Calgary, and of course my experience comes from Edmonton. As he touched on, communication is vital to the success of an investigation. Whether you're talking to a witness, the complainant, or you're trying to elicit something from a suspect, or you are talking to other police officers about an investigation, communication is really at the heart of whether or not you'll be successful. During my 10 years in the police service, you know, I noticed this quite quickly, that within police services intelligence sharing is highly internalized, and it can be internalized, in Edmonton, as an example, to specific divisions, where there is difficulty in communicating from one division to another even within the same policing organization or agency.

So it's important that we highlight this motion and encourage the government to work on communication sharing, intelligence sharing because it can be an incredibly slow process, and when crime is moving as fast as it does and you're trying to catch up to a suspect, speed can be an important quality.

The communication breakdown: I think it's most apparent when you're trying to search for information and you don't have all the specifics of what you're trying to look for. If you know a suspect's name, you can easily pull up information on them, but if you're using something like descriptions or a type of crime or an area, then it can be quite difficult to gather that information. You're often flooded with so much data that it would take you hours and hours just to be able to go through it. We even have crime analysts dedicated to try to search those databases, but even their time is dedicated to a lot of other files. For front-line officers you often don't get the benefit of having somebody who's secondary or back in the office being able to search that information.

So we should be pursuing joint databases across the province and in all jurisdictions that allow for information to be quickly and easily accessed. This would improve the ability of the crime analyst, as I mentioned, and the officers who are on patrol to be able to better equip themselves with information quickly to make better decisions. This can mean the difference in quickly identifying a suspect, making an arrest, finding stolen property, and being able to prevent future crimes with a more effective investigation. If you allow too much time to elapse from when a crime was committed, often a lot of evidence can be lost.

3:30

For many people who commit a crime, it's not their first time. There's always a first, I guess, but for a lot of people that the police services deal with, there is typically a background. They may have been arrested before, they might be a suspect in other occurrences, but timely and accurate information sharing can close those cases and then prevent new victims and new crimes from happening as well. It's not uncommon to see individuals commit multiple crimes in multiple jurisdictions as they move from one division to another, or they go from Edmonton out to St. Albert and back to Sherwood Park. As the Member for Calgary-West had pointed out, in areas in and around Calgary you're often having different agencies investigating the same person, but they're not communicating with one another to be as effective as possible.

I want to add that some information sharing does exist to an extent. It's done best, though, when those tools are readily available. There is some communication for higher level investigations, but for the ones that patrol typically deals with, you're typically on your own.

Given the volume of crimes that occur each day and the volume of work each officer has on a daily basis and when you add in shift work and people working opposite each other, it can be very

difficult to share information. So what I see is an opportunity to utilize more up-to-date technology to improve this and develop better ways of accessing the information and searching for it, to find pieces of information within huge volumes of reports. I think the EPS average is several hundred thousand files a year, and the information that you might need can be quickly lost in just the sheer volume of what's happening if you don't have proper search engines to be able to access that data.

When you add in the time it takes to write an investigation, which over the years has grown from about an hour dedicated to an arrest file up to about five hours today, saving time is essential. I think people would expect that officers are going to be out in their community, that they're going to be patrolling, and that they're going to be ready to answer not just the nonemergency line but, of course, the 911 calls that come in. I don't think people understand the frequency of how many calls not just the Edmonton Police Service but all services receive. It is nonstop. It is all day, every day. You seldom see – you know, a police car, as it's driving around, doesn't always have its lights and sirens on. Other agencies or first responders such as the fire department have their lights and sirens on for whatever they go to, but police are often going to a call or investigating a call and the sirens aren't on. It doesn't mean that they don't have a huge workload. It just means that they don't have to respond as quickly. But I can assure you that they have investigations that are ongoing, that there are calls that our outstanding, and that there are ones that they're working on with their partners.

We need to make sure that their time is utilized the best it can be, and provincial databases and better search tools will help law enforcement across the province be able to close more cases. Of course, this leads to increasing trust with the public as you become more successful. It'll help make the streets safer, and it has a higher chance of returning property to people if it's been stolen. It also, as I touched on before, provides an opportunity to get better evidence the faster you are at catching and identifying a suspect.

You know, this motion helps establish the grounds for the government to respond to the issue with police internal communications and communications with one another given that law enforcement officers need all the tools that they can get right now, I think, to be as effective as possible. There has been a lot of conversation around policing in Alberta. It has been going on not just these last few months but the last few years with rural crime as well. I know first-hand, you know, having been 10 years in policing with the EPS, that the vast majority of officers work extremely hard every day to do the best they can for the citizens that they are sworn to protect. They're truly trying extremely hard. They are overwhelmed with calls, typically 40 or 50 calls outstanding in a division in Edmonton that need attention. It takes a long time sometimes to get to them, but those officers are trying, and I think it's up to the government and the policing leadership and organizations to come together to be able to increase access to communication so that these investigations are done faster and are more effective.

I just would close with that and say that in a lot of these conversations we're talking about the organization; we're not talking about the individual officers. I just want to highlight that because I know that those individuals are trying very hard. Sometimes when we reference EPS or CPS, that can get quite personal, but we're talking about the leadership of those organizations wanting to see a better way of policing and be able to come together to be more effective.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, are there any other members wishing to join debate on Motion 506?

Mr. Rowsell: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support private member's motion 506, which urges better communication between various levels of government and the different law enforcement agencies in the province. For those of us who live in rural Alberta, the consistently higher rates of crime experienced in the country are worrisome and disheartening. Crime in rural Alberta occurs at nearly a 40 per cent higher rate than in urban centres. Mostly this falls under a variety of property crimes and theft-related infractions as well as assault, mischief, and disturbing the peace.

People live in rural Alberta for the peace and the tranquility it provides and for the values of hard work, self-sufficiency, and the genuine community that are its hallmarks. Criminals cannot continue to take advantage of jurisdictional overlaps, and our police forces should not continue to be prohibited by deficiencies in communications. It is simply not acceptable in 21st-century Alberta.

I would like to mention that this motion was introduced by the Member for Calgary-West, who himself is a former Calgary Police Service officer. I'm honoured to serve in this Assembly next to him as well as our other former law enforcement officer, from Edmonton, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, and who better to understand the deficits of our current system than these two gentlemen?

Our government respects members of law enforcement and the tough job that they face in today's policing environment. All too often crime will be committed in one area, and the perpetrators will relocate to a neighbouring jurisdiction. This happens in order to take advantage of the gaps presented by switching between two different police organizations. This is especially true for our large urban centres of Edmonton and Calgary and the rural communities that surround them. It is also true for a place such as Lloydminster. As many of you know, Lloydminster is located on the border with Saskatchewan. Rather, the border is located within Lloydminster. This can cause some jurisdictional confusion on many different levels, and I have recently spoken about this in the Assembly.

During a crisis time is extremely important. What this motion is calling for is improvement in response time and effective communication. Albertans, particularly rural Albertans, deserve no less. This motion demonstrates our intent to better serve Albertans, who elected us to make their lives better and safer. Safer communities mean more of everything that is good in life such as more carefree days at the park, the fair, or a rodeo without fear of a break-in back at home; better peace of mind when going to sleep at night; children playing and riding their bikes safely down the street; and, very importantly, safer communities mean more investment, more business, and greater consumer confidence in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we need law enforcement, and we need law enforcement to be responsive and in tune with the needs of the communities they serve. By improving the communication between police services currently at work in Alberta, we see a reduction in crime. I encourage members to support this motion, which demonstrates our intent to close the gaps in law enforcement communication in this province. Let's help lock up the offenders and protect the innocent. For rural Alberta the time is now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Camrose has risen to debate.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Motion 506 that has been proposed by my

hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-West. His advocacy not only for his constituents but also for police officers across the province does not go unnoticed, and this motion speaks volumes to that. This motion is the right step towards fulfilling our government's commitment to Albertans; that is, to give our police the tools and resources they need to protect law-abiding citizens. Albertans put serious criminals behind bars.

3:40

In my riding of Camrose we have our own police force, but the resources for the Camrose Police Service are limited. In fact, we're experiencing a shortage of police officers, but that's a story for another day. Back in October the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General came to Camrose for a town hall on rural crime. A gentleman had gotten up and spoken, and his words shook the room. He is a reformed criminal. He explained that after a life of crime and spending time in corrections facilities due to repeat offences, he decided to turn his life around, and now he's married and has three beautiful children. That's a success.

When I was reading the text of this motion, I thought back to the very moment when he spoke. The gentleman had explained that the reason why he was successful in his repeated offences was because he knew where to go and how long it would take for police to get there. Why was he able to do this? Not only because of a lack of police officers in the Camrose Police Service but also due to a lack of resources that police have on hand when a crime occurs.

Mr. Speaker, by the time the crime gets called into the 911 dispatcher and reported to the Camrose Police Service, it is quickly realized that the offender is long gone and out of the jurisdiction of the Camrose Police Service. Dispatch then has to relay this to the RCMP. Once the RCMP finally receives this message, it once again realizes that the offender is in the jurisdiction of the Edmonton Police Service. However, the RCMP and the Edmonton Police Service cannot communicate with one another. This means that if an officer from the RCMP needs to contact the Edmonton Police Service, they are unable to directly communicate with each other, and this results in obvious delay, opening the door for potential miscommunication, giving the offender the chance to get away and reoffend. This puts Albertans in my riding and across the province at a greater risk.

There are means of communication established between the RCMP and chapters of the Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association, but there must be better and open communication between the police services themselves. If the RCMP and local police forces do not have an open line of communication, how can anybody reasonably expect crime rates to go down? How could anyone reasonably expect police to give the highest quality of service when their ability to do so is restricted? You can't.

Rural crime is an issue that affects each and every rural Albertan in some way, and it is our duty as legislators to take the appropriate measures towards reducing crime in general and to keep Albertans safe. Mr. Speaker, we live in a world that is rapidly changing. It is now time for us to take a proactive approach to ensuring that law enforcement has the necessary resources to be able to deliver a better quality of service and protection. This motion is a step in the right direction to ensuring that. With the Member for Calgary-West being a former police officer himself, it is clear that his expertise and experience guided him when he proposed this motion. I believe this motion is another step in the right direction towards fulfilling the promise that our government made to Albertans just over a year ago while also serving as the foundation for our future legislation to be introduced and to continue to build on that promise.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Motion 506 is what we are debating. I believe that the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has risen to debate.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Motion 506 that has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-West. My hon. colleague served for more than 12 years with the Calgary Police Service and has experienced first-hand when communication and collaboration between police services has been done well and where there is room for improvement. The time from when the information is initially needed to the time the information is received can span weeks and months. It is possible that certain information could be within our jurisdictions and an officer might not know where to ask for it. While investigations are time sensitive, we need to make it easier and more efficient for our law enforcement to work on our behalf.

A fairer, faster, and more responsive justice system will prioritize the safety of every Albertan. For example, ideas like a single data system for law enforcement to use in all jurisdictions in Alberta would be a step in the right direction. In my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville we are close enough to the capital city that criminals from Edmonton and other areas are driving out and taking advantage of the fact that the response time for law enforcement is typically much longer in rural areas than it is in urban areas. The loophole is affecting my constituents, and it is affecting rural constituents across Alberta.

It is also all too common to see individuals commit multiple crimes in multiple jurisdictions. Without effective communication or intelligence sharing, law enforcement agencies are forced to use time and resources on the same perpetrator. This is not conducive to effective policing.

In our platform our government committed to act to give our police and prosecutors the tools and resources they needed to protect law-abiding Albertans and put serious criminals behind bars. It is important to take a proactive approach to ensuring that law enforcement has the necessary resources it needs to be able to deliver a better quality of service and protection rather than taking a reactive approach after a tragedy has occurred and assessing how that could have been prevented. I see this motion as how we can more effectively identify criminal operations, reduce incidences of crime, and create a safer community for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

On Government Motion 506 I see the hon. Member for Highwood has risen to speak.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always really excited to be able to stand up in this House and support a motion like this that will help deal with crime in Alberta, both, you know, urban crime and rural crime. Motion 506, of course, urges better communication between various levels of government and different law enforcement agencies across this province, and I think this is critically important.

I'd like to really thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-West for bringing this motion forward. This really speaks to a lot of experience that he had serving as a member of CPS. You know, the depth which he brings to the table is really important as we move forward. I'm also really honoured to serve with my other colleague for Leduc-Beaumont, who has served many years in enforcement here in Alberta.

It's really important. Communication really is a big key to addressing some of the problems that we have within our province

right now, and before I get into discussing this in full, I just want to say that I really want to applaud all of our officers in our province for the dedication and service that they have to defending our province. I know myself and our government respect the members of our law enforcement agencies and the difficult job they do. They put their lives on the line every day to protect ours. This is about providing them additional tools, additional resources, additional systems to be able to actually do their job better.

Now, you know, I don't think I ever get through talking about rural crime without mentioning the case with Eddie and Jessica Maurice, which happened in Highwood. Having said that, the reality of the situation, which I think is so common for an area like Highwood, with Okotoks, Black Diamond, and Turner Valley bordering a large urban centre, is the fact that crime – the criminals come out of the big cities a lot. This is very common. We see it on the news all the time. The criminal in Eddie and Jessica's case alone was from the city of Calgary.

Now, this isn't by chance. This is because criminals themselves are aware of the struggles and sometimes the barriers with communication between RCMP and CPS, and they try to maximize on that. That's why I think it's really important that we build on this communication system to be able to address this as we move forward. We talk about the revolving-door criminals, how many times these criminals rotate through different jurisdictions for the exact reason, that on the primary, secondary, and tertiary conditions of release they keep getting released over and over again, and there isn't even the knowledge from the two different departments that this is actually going on. We do have to find ways to be able to build on this, to be able to help with rural crime, which is so essential.

You know, one piece I do want to talk to as well is more effective communication, and I think that's on a lot of different levels. I was speaking to a peace officer alone that works in Okotoks. He told me a story about a high-speed chase that started in the city of Calgary, and it then went out into the rural area onto the highways on which he was doing traffic speed control. This was a dangerous offender, and he was even completely unaware that this was happening and that the police had actually called off the chase and were looking for air support. He almost got himself in a very, very dangerous situation because there wasn't communication between the CPS, RCMP, and peace officers. This was a very dangerous situation. This is about building a better system, but it's also about protecting those that are putting themselves on the front lines to protect us. There's more work that can be done here to be able to assist them.

3:50

You know, this motion is a serious demonstration of our commitment and our promise to continue to improve the condition of rural crime and crime in our province. I said it throughout. I started going to rural crime town halls over two years ago, even before I was elected. There are a lot of issues that were brought up at these rural crime town halls, and this was one of them. This was one that was continually brought up over and over again. I just have to say that I'm incredibly proud of the work that this government has done because I've always said that it's not one thing that's going to cure crime in Alberta; it's a multitude of different changes that need to happen to be able to effectively address crime in our province. It's that continued pressure, that we've got to continue to put the pressure on to do better every year, little changes in every different area.

We need to lean on the experience of those officers who have the experience. We also have to lean on the information that we're getting back from residents. That's why, you know, the Minister of Justice spent a lot of time dedicated to touring around this province and talking to thousands of residents on the needs. I think through

this – you look at Bill 25, Protecting Alberta Industry from Theft Act, Bill 27 from last year, the Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law-abiding Property Owners) Amendment Act: these are solid commitments to rural crime. You talk about RAPID, our rural Alberta provincial integrated defence force, adding up to 400 people to respond to 911 calls. I think that's important, and it actually plays into this motion because we are adding additional resources to responding to 911 calls, so we do have to focus on improving communication because we're adding additional resources there. These are an additional 400 people that we have to make sure are co-ordinated properly and that they're in the know and that they are getting the shared information from EPS, CPS, RCMP.

This is something that I think is going to have an incredible benefit to be able to bring these departments together. I would urge everybody in this House to support this motion. You know, for a long period of time, for four years under the previous government, there was little to no movement on rural crime. These individuals in these rural areas – and I will tell you that the common theme from all the rural crime town halls I went to was that rural constituents felt abandoned. For four years with the previous government they felt ignored. They didn't feel safe in their homes. Motion 506 and the constant move of this government are finally giving them some faith that they have a government working for them so that they once and for all can feel safe in their homes once again.

I urge everybody to support Motion 506. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Do I see any other hon. members wishing to speak to Motion 506? 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 speak to the motion by the hon. Member for Calgary-West. The motion reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage more effective communication and collaboration between police services operating in Alberta for the purposes of identifying criminal operations, reducing incidence of crime, and creating safer communities for all Albertans.

Let me say this, Mr. Speaker. I do support this motion because what I understand is that better communication in, you know, any task does help to achieve the mandate, the goal you have. In this such case, if the issue in our focus at hand we are discussing is to control the crime in our province, definitely the communication between the police services working in the various areas would actually improve and help do their jobs and get better results. I do think that this is a very critically important step, I would say, increasing communication to control the crime. At the same time I would say that we have discussed this issue in very different contexts, debating a number of bills in this House, and given the situation where we are and the approaches, this step, what my hunch is, backed by the number of facts, might not be enough, but I would say it's a good first step in the right direction. That's why I really wanted to support this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to refer to some of the work that the previous NDP government, actually some of the steps, some of the work they have done to address the rural crime in this province. The previous government – as we know, I was not part of that government in the last four years. The NDP government actually, under their rural crime strategies, brought forward a \$10 million rural crime strategy that included a focus on streamlining and hiring more police and prosecutors in the province. This was a seven-point plan. The strategy included a plan to combat rural crime, and it was

developed alongside the RCMP, basically, who have direct, first-hand experience dealing in this area, I would say.

That plan put more crime-fighting tools in the hands of law enforcement, again, more boots on the ground. This plan provided funding for 39 regional RCMP officers in Alberta. This work was expanding on a crime-reducing unit pilot project in central Alberta, and that arrested dozens of prolific offenders. It recovered almost a half a million dollars in stolen property and seized more than 20 guns and weapons, all in the span of just a few months. It was from October 2017 to March 2018. It had also added 40 new civilian members, which will free up officers to spend more time in communities investigating crime. This strategy included funds to hire up to 10 more Crown prosecutors in rural areas as well as focus on better technology, better conditions between peace officers and the RCMP, and an education component.

4:00

In 2018 the government budget unveiled on March 22 included an additional \$13.4 million to help the RCMP keep communities across Alberta safe and to hire 20 more officers. This strategy by the NDP has also put funds into hiring 13 new staff in bail hearing offices, 55 new court clerks to help clear backlogs, four new Provincial Court judges, another 10 Crown prosecutors, and a \$7.9 million increase in the legal aid budget. The 2018-19 Justice department's annual report says that it led to reduced car thefts and break and enters, and there was a 9 per cent drop in rural property crime reported in that report.

The RCMP have reported that property crimes have decreased in Alberta, but the overall rural crime report remains quite high. That was the concern. The rural rate in the prairies is almost 36 to 42 per cent higher than in urban centres according to a 2017 Statistics Canada report.

I have learned the information to go through what was the sum of the initiatives taken by the former NDP government in those past four years. As I said about this motion, I would say that the previous government also took initiatives that were in the right direction. Some of the reports I referred to in my talking points highlighted, you know, acknowledged there were some improvements in combatting crime in the province. So when we are saying . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows. However, under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion, we have reached 55 minutes of debate, for clarification.

I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-West to close debate.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all members in the House for participating in this debate. I will say that I thank the Member for Edmonton-Meadows. I certainly understand that he wasn't here in the last Legislature, but the plan the NDP had put forward regarding rural crime was a complete and utter failure. You only have to look at your NDP rural colleagues in the Chamber to understand how that went.

I will say this. The issue regarding communication is not new, Mr. Speaker. It has been going on for longer than I have been a police officer. It probably goes back a multitude of decades, and that causes the frustration within the police services. It causes frustrations amongst the law enforcement community. It causes frustration amongst the Crown prosecutors and the law enforcement community. With that is what is known as unintentional adverse relationships. Obviously, the public perception would be that all police services are on the same team and thinking alike and are all communicating collectively along with the prosecutors, but when

there is ineffective communication, when the lines of communication are in any way interrupted, then that becomes the adverse relationship; that is, when police services don't necessarily have the same respect for each other or when prosecutors don't have the same respect for police and vice versa, the public perceives or the public believes that that is what is currently going on, and in order to effectively communicate, we must improve that.

As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, the answers are there. The answers were put forward in 2006, and I would argue that the answers were put forward prior to 2006. In order to actually fix this, in order to improve the relationship, actually improve the system that we are currently in, right now, in a whole bunch of levers – and I said this in the last Legislature. There is no one specific fix to this problem. It is a multitude of levers that are ultimately going to address the issues of rural crime, address the issues within the Chamber, going to address the issues regarding police carding. It will be effective communication. It will be when police services actually start communicating with each other the way the public expects them to be communicating. With that, it will be leadership. It will be, at least in my expectation, leadership of this government that is going to go past the leadership within those policing organizations and, as I mentioned earlier, go past the egos within those organizations.

I challenge all the leaders – and I know they're not the same folks that were there from 2006. I challenge all these new leaders within those policing organizations to do better, to effectively communicate, and to check the egos at the door and do what is best for the people that are within this province, to do what is best for the people whom they serve. In order to do that, they must effectively communicate.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank again everybody for participating in this. I want to thank all the members in the opposition, all the members on the government side. I am truly humbled to put forward this motion, and I just want to take a moment to thank all the law enforcement community within this province and within this country, whom I have had the humbled pleasure to serve with. They are good people who do not seek attention, who do not seek a pat on the back and will always head towards the danger when others run from it, and we must do what I believe is necessary to respect the fact that these people put their lives on the line on a daily basis to serve us in this community.

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

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 28

Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Service Alberta has risen.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and move second reading of Bill 28, Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020.

The changes that we've proposed in this legislation are meant to help protect Albertans and their families in their own communities. I imagine that most if not all members of this Assembly were as shocked as I was to hear that there were no prohibitions against convicted sex offenders being able to legally change their names in

Alberta. To be clear, we're talking about offenders who have committed truly heinous acts, including sexual interference, sexual exploitation, incest, child pornography, sexual assault, and trafficking of a minor. I'm disgusted just reading out a small portion of these offences listed under section 490.011 of Canada's Criminal Code. It's difficult to read this list of offences, and I can't even begin to understand what the survivors of these atrocious acts have had to deal with. Unfortunately, too many Albertans and too many Canadians have been victimized by these acts. That is why it's so important for us to bring forward this legislation.

4:10

Ever since I learned about this problem, I have been listening to survivors of sexual violence, and I have been listening to the organizations that support survivors of sexual violence. I have heard their stories, and they have reinforced the fact for me that even one instance where these crimes are committed is one too many. Even one family having to endure such devastation is one too many.

As legislators we have a duty to protect Albertans, so we must act. What we have proposed are some very simple changes that can effect big change for the protection of Alberta children, families, and communities. As you may know, Mr. Speaker, Alberta already has some of the strongest legislation when it comes to legal changes of name. Part of those requirements includes providing fingerprints to the RCMP's Canadian police information centre in Ottawa so that the old name can be linked to the new name.

But our legislation can be stronger, and that is why we are adding the requirement for Albertans 18 years of age or older to provide a criminal record check or a police information check with their legal change of name application. In doing so, if an applicant has been convicted of a designated offence, of which I provided some examples just a moment ago, that person will be unable to complete the legal process and must continue to live under their own name, the name they were convicted under. This is a common-sense change, Mr. Speaker. It is common sense and it is the right thing to do, which is why, in addition to tabling this legislation, I called upon every province and territory across Canada to join us in implementing these strong protections so that families all across Canada can enjoy the same protections that we are bringing forward in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is straightforward. The changes are clear and designed to protect Alberta children, families, and communities. I'm looking forward to the debate on this bill, and I'm hopeful that I can count on the support of all members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise in the House today. As I like to do the first time that I speak in the House each week, I like to just remind folks that we are still in the midst of a pandemic, and we need not forget that the front-line workers out there are still heroes. That's health care workers, that's grocery store workers, and that's folks working in the hospitality industry. The list goes on. You know, I actually just had a COVID test on Friday. I'm asymptomatic, but as we're being encouraged to do, I got the test. I was just so blown away by the efficiency of the operation and by the health care workers that I interacted with there, who were just so kind and so helpful and clearly care about Albertans.

What I'd like to do is that I would like to speak to Bill 28, which is the Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020. I can absolutely echo a lot of the comments from the Minister of Service Alberta. We, I think all members of this House, absolutely support survivors. We believe survivors, and we know how traumatizing – I mean, unless you've experienced it first-hand, you don't realize just how traumatizing sexual assault, sexual violence is.

Like the minister, I had the opportunity to hear from a number of sexual assault and sexual violence survivors. Over the time that I've been the critic for status of women, it's been an issue where I've reached out to many folks who have either, you know, been survivors of sexual violence or were working on the front lines, and the stories are horrific. We know, sadly, that rates of violence, not just sexual violence but domestic violence, too, are on the rise here in Alberta. We know, sadly, that this pandemic, COVID-19, has exacerbated a lot of challenges, particularly around violence. I fear – I fear – that we don't even know the gravity of the situation because we know a lot of folks, particularly women, aren't reporting, that a lot of women and children aren't safe at home right now. You know, my heart goes out to those folks, but they need to know that we're here for them and that we support them. There are some incredible organizations that are there for them as well: Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. There's a 310 line as well that I can pull up in case anybody is listening and wondering how they can access supports.

But I must express my deep disappointment about the lack of supports for survivors of sexual violence that we've seen quite recently from this government. In fact, on the very day that this minister introduced Bill 28, I heard from two survivors of horrific violence, one of whom was a survivor of sexual violence. Both of those women reached out to me and were concerned about the raid on the victims of crime fund, Bill 16. The first, Tarin Arndt – I can say her name and I can say the other person's name as well because they were willing to be retraumatized so that the Minister of Justice could hear their stories, and he refused to listen – was the survivor of a horrific random assault. She was punched, she was pushed down stairs, and she was strangled, none of which she expected. She was able to access the victims of crime fund. She talked about how that victims of crime fund allowed her, someone who's working, actually, in the front lines supporting children, in fact, to help pay for psychological services, the intense PTSD with which she was struggling, with which she still struggles to this very day.

Tarin was so brave in sharing her story. So, too, was Nikki, the other survivor, a survivor of sexual violence, a survivor of a perpetrator here in Edmonton who is just now going to hear his sentence. His name is Matt McKnight – I don't mind sharing it because it's been in the news lately – someone who sexually assaulted multiple victims. Nikki reached out, and she shared her story as well. Both women hadn't shared their stories all that publicly. Tarin hadn't shared it at all. The absolute courage that it took for those two women to share their stories, and I quote – Tarin said that she would share her story because she felt that it might help change this government's mind. I was hopeful with her. I said: "You're right, you know. This is huge. Maybe they don't understand the impacts of that piece of legislation and just how critical the funds are in the victims of crime fund."

Now, because that bill has passed despite our attempts to amend it multiple times, including a very strong amendment from my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, who put forth that at least 75 per cent be allocated to victims of crime – that side of the House defeated that despite the warnings of Tarin; of Nikki; of Deb Tomlinson, who is the head of the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services; of Jan Reimer, who is the head of the Alberta

Council of Women's Shelters; I'm not recalling his name, but head of the victim-based policing services association. The list goes on, the number of stakeholders, nonpartisan stakeholders, who said: listen; you are making a mistake by attacking the victims of crime fund. How did this government respond? They didn't listen. They didn't listen to any of those stakeholders, none of them, and they refused to listen to survivors.

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

So you can understand why I stand up here as a critic for status of women, as someone who is actively pushing for this government to support survivors. You can understand that it's with mixed emotions that I speak to this bill when that minister is claiming to prioritize supports for sexual assault survivors. I hate to call them victims, but, of course, that's the name of the victims of crime fund.

4:20

I want to urge this government to really think about next steps. I'm hopeful there'll be more legislation that will address survivors of sexual violence. I'm hoping perhaps even in the regulations of Bill 16. I'm not sure. I just want to be hopeful because a whole lot of survivors have lost hope. In fact, what was most troubling after Tarin and Nikki shared their stories was that Nikki was actually painted by this government as an NDP plant. This minister, the Justice minister, smeared her on social media. Nikki is a citizen of Red Deer. All she did was reach out to me via Twitter and say: hey; I'm really worried about Bill 16, the victims of crime fund. In fact, she shared quite openly on social media that not only has she not been an NDP member; she used to be a supporter of the PCs.

Ms Hoffman: Used to be.

Member Irwin: "Used to be" is the key word. You're right, Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

You can only imagine. Not only were survivors like Tarin and Nikki completely ignored by this government and by that minister; that minister then took it a step further to try to smear their credibility.

Mr. Nally: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been called.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Nally: Under 23(b), in terms of relevance. We're debating Bill 28 right now. If we can discuss Bill 28, that would be great.

Member Irwin: Absolutely. We're talking about supports for sexual assault, sexual violence victims, so I am going to again come back to the bill. I'm framing my arguments around broader supports for sexual assault victims, but I will get back explicitly to the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

While a point of order has been called, I don't find that this is a point of order, in line with granting some latitude to our Official Opposition. However, I would caution the hon. member and all members of the House: if you could please keep your comments relevant to the bill under discussion. We are on second reading of Bill 28.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll reiterate my point that it was that very Minister for Service Alberta that argued in this

House just a few moments ago that this bill is about protecting survivors of sexual assault, my point being that, yes, absolutely in there we support this bill. We support Bill 28, but we find troubling to date the ways in which this government has shown their support – and I'm using air quotes – for sexual assault survivors.

Yes, absolutely, we agree that the changes in Bill 28 are a good way to ensure that survivors of sexual assault will feel protected. It makes some small changes, and we agree that this bill, as the Minister for Service Alberta alluded to, will provide some clarity and it will provide some certainty. But, again, we need to provide survivors of sexual assault tangible supports. I've called as well on the minister responsible for status of women to be specific about those supports. I'll call on all of you because, in fact, violence – sexual violence, domestic violence – was highlighted in your platform. Yes, Bill 28 is one way to support survivors of sexual assault, but there are so many other ways.

Let me talk about some of those other ways. Now, when we talked about Clare's law, when we talked about the human trafficking bill, Bill 8, we talked about how – you know what? – we will support these bills in principle because in the case of human trafficking we absolutely know it's an issue. We know it's an issue that disproportionately affects women, indigenous women and from racialized backgrounds. With Clare's law we said: yes, in principle we absolutely support this bill. But with both of those pieces of legislation we were very clear that without investments by this government in housing, in child care, in the broad social services net that our government, when we were in power, was so proud to bolster, without those supports, particularly for women, those bills are meaningless and, in fact, arguably, harmful because if a woman is fleeing domestic violence and she has no supports for her children, she has no affordable housing to which she can turn, then what's the point? So again I'm telling you that these pieces of legislation in which you purport to support survivors do very little unless they're backed up with concrete action.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

That's what we're calling on you to do. We're calling on you to take concrete, tangible steps to support survivors. And I wonder. We heard from so many stakeholders during Bill 16 deliberations – like I said, I listed a number of them before – from all across this province who wondered who'd been consulted on that piece of legislation. I'd ask the Minister of Service Alberta in this case: in your consultation on this bill, on Bill 28, what did those stakeholders propose? Clearly you had a conversation . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. I would just remind all members of this House to direct their arguments through the chair.

Member Irwin: Thank you for that reminder, Mr. Speaker.

What did those stakeholders say to the minister during that consultation? I imagine that, as I started to say there, the conversation was framed around how Bill 28 will provide supports for survivors of sexual violence. I'm curious, and I'd love for that minister to weigh in on this. What else did those stakeholders say? Did they talk about supports to the victims of crime fund? Did they talk about a broader range of supports, as I alluded to earlier: housing, child care? The list goes on. I would imagine – and, again, I won't put words in that minister's mouth, but I would imagine that they would have brought that conversation back to the clear need for financial supports for survivors of sexual assault.

What I'd like to do is that I'd like to close my remarks by again reiterating that absolutely I think all members in this House know just how crucial it is that we protect children, we protect survivors

of sexual assault and sexual violence. This bill, agreed, will help, but we're urging this government to think about the broader steps that it needs to take to show that they're actually listening to survivors of sexual violence, to show that they're actually supporting survivors of sexual violence, sexual assault and their families. One of the best ways to do that is to allow those survivors to have access to funds that will help them with the need for psychological supports, the need for therapy, whatever it might be.

Mr. Nally: Point of order under 23(f), Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I note that a point of order has been called, I believe by the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Nally: It seems like we're still debating a bill other than the one in front of us, which is Bill 28. Unless the member intends to actually rescind the bill, then I'd ask that we focus our comments on Bill 28, which is why we're here this evening.

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

Member Irwin: Again, Mr. Speaker, I've been very clear, and as the previous chair pointed out, it was not a point of order because I'm bringing it back to the broader issue of supports for survivors of sexual assault and sexual violence.

The Acting Speaker: I'm prepared to rule. I do not find a point of order at this stage. However, I do look forward to the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood regarding bringing it back.

4:30

Debate Continued

Member Irwin: Thank you. I was just in fact finishing my remarks when I was interrupted there, and I was finishing my remarks to just point out that, again, no one in this House is debating, is disputing the importance of ensuring that survivors of sexual assault are supported. Again, Bill 28 is one way to do so, but without broader, more robust supports such as the victims of crime fund it's really hard to accept that this government is truly supporting survivors of sexual assault and violence.

With that, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate on Bill 28? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise – I think it's my first opportunity – to comment on Bill 28. I'd be happy to be corrected if it isn't. Constituency break has intervened, but I'm quite certain that we are at my first opportunity to provide some comments on this bill.

The first piece, I think, that I would like to offer to the minister responsible – and I do have some questions for him at this stage of the debate as well, that I'm hoping that members of Executive Council can provide some answers to at the second reading stage of debate, before we vote on it, because they are sort of questions of clarification and existing processes that I think would just be helpful and in the public interest given that there are important stakeholders who have a great deal of expertise in these matters. This is a matter of pressing public interest, of course, and protecting

survivors of sexual assault is a matter of great importance and, I believe, a shared value on both sides of the House. I think that's pretty fair to say.

I think I will begin my remarks, Mr. Speaker, with indicating that I, too, support ensuring that survivors of sexual assault are protected and supported – I believe that this is a fairly noncontroversial statement – and the changes in Bill 28 are a good way to ensure that survivors of sexual assault will feel protected. In that spirit, then, I offer my qualified support for this piece of legislation. I think this bill provides some clarity and certainty. The government can already ban name changes and access information from the national sex offender registry. If, in fact, we find ourselves in a situation where there are problems with people changing their names, people who have been convicted of the specific crimes that are under consideration by this bill, then I think it's fair to say that the members of the Official Opposition are glad that this bill can be a solution to that particular problem.

I believe there are a number of questions that maybe we could entertain at this point. The first question I might have is: in the government's consultation on the bill did stakeholders bring up concerns of changes to overall supports to sexual assault survivors? Did they propose any other ideas that might financially support victims of sexual assault or otherwise support that journey from becoming a victim of such a horrific crime to becoming a survivor and finding a way through the world after such a traumatic event? I'd be curious as to what the feedback from stakeholders to the ministry was on this bill and whether stakeholders indicated their desire to see subsequent supports for survivors of sexual assault, whether in the form of financial compensation, therapy or other health care interventions, or other benefits.

Now, information on sex offenders is available in the national registry as it stands right now, so it is just a simple question for the minister, what he expects to find in criminal record checks that is not already contained within the national registry. Have there been issues of the registry not being updated? Are there other issues that we need to flag as a Legislature, as people who share the values of trying to make sure that we are actually solving a problem for survivors of these crimes? Is there something that we can work on there with advocacy with respect to the federal government or how these matters are handled? I think the minister could probably fill in some blanks for the public on this.

The federal government also requires name and address changes to be updated on that national registry, so if there are gaps here, I think it would be incumbent upon the minister to explain what those are. I think it's fair to say that the Official Opposition would be happy to assist in addressing those gaps if there is, in fact, either a policy or programmatic or resources change that must be made by the federal approach to this.

What is the length of time to change a name now? What will it be in the future? Will requiring a criminal record check delay a name change for most law-abiding citizens, and will it increase costs? I think that for many people, whether they get married or get divorced or are changing their gender identity from what it was assigned at birth – those are just three instances in which the vast majority of name changes occur. Those are the circumstances. I'd be happy to be corrected if I'm wrong on that, if there's something I'm missing about name changing, but generally speaking, it is marriage, divorce, those kinds of things, personal preference. Then there's the larger question of being able to live a full expression of one's gender identity, which is, of course, something that is protected under section 15 of the Charter. I'd like some clarification from the minister on expected timelines and what kind of feedback they got from both stakeholders and folks doing these services and if there's expected to be any charge associated with that.

In section 51 of the Vital Statistics Act the registrar can and should stop anyone from changing their name if the person is intending to mislead the public. The government of Alberta also produces a list of high-risk sex offenders, and through the Minister of Justice, if it is in fact determined in the public interest, can the registrar check the national offender registry as well? I guess my question there would be: what are the current powers of the registrar, and has it already been the case that the registrar has exercised those powers in terms of people who have already been convicted of some of the offences that are detailed in the act? Have they already been blocked from changing their name? Has that occurred, and what is partial about those powers as they exist right now? I think it's just a question of clarification on the process right now.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the minister would be, I think, well served in simply updating the House, perhaps at the Committee of the Whole stage, once he's had an opportunity to review the questions, that are presented in good faith. We are otherwise, as I said at the outset, inclined to support this bill. That's why I'm structuring my comments in that way. I think that there are some just public interest and other clarification matters that the minister could do and that would be helpful in our conversations here.

4:40

Now, in the press conference for the bill the Premier indicated that name changes are not tracked, so my question would be: are they tracked in the federal system? It is our understanding that they are, but if that is not the case, then just some clarity would be good, to be provided to the House, on that. Alberta does already have a publicly available list of high-risk sex offenders, so is the government of Alberta already tracking name changes? The federal government tracks name changes of sex offenders. Does the government of Alberta make note of these changes? My question there would more drive at an allocation of resources, ensuring that the systems that we have in place already are functioning to their highest degree of efficacy, simply because if we already have a system that in the main should be accomplishing what is laid out in this bill but that if for reasons of resourcing – you know, number of FTEs within the registrar's office, reductions in budget at Service Alberta, or reallocation of FTEs – there is some evidence that that process is not being undertaken currently, then this legislation won't actually drive to the heart of the issue or the problem. So I would just want some clarification from the minister on that.

Finally, to wrap up, conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, at this stage of the deliberations on Bill 28, which is amendments to the Vital Statistics Act, I think we need to be careful that we are not passing this legislation as an excuse to do nothing to actually, materially address the systemic issues that survivors of sexual assault tell us, that we know they have to deal with to rebuild their lives. We know this because they have told us.

That is why I asked about the record of consultation and what stakeholders and others said to this minister, because we know because they have told us. They haven't just told us as MLAs, Mr. Speaker; they have told the public, really bravely, I might add. This is the hardest thing that anyone can really talk about publicly. That's why this crime goes and even for generations went without consequence, because it's tough, and it's shameful, and there are, you know, issues of guilt that are associated with it. It is difficult to have a real reckoning with the process of healing from victimization. So I want to make sure that those voices are heard, because the tremendous bravery it took for people to speak out in the first place needs to be honoured by people who are elected to do a job and people who are entrusted with the public interest and people that are expected to lead on these and on other matters.

My final comments will be that, you know, yes, in its form right now and particularly if the minister can provide some edifying comments on the questions that I have raised, I will support this bill. But I am going to put on the record that I am monumentally uninterested in supporting efforts that take away from supports to people who have experienced sexual violence, and I'm uninterested in words to address this very serious crime and the very serious and difficult ways that survivors have to reckon with this. If we are doing this as some kind of exercise in papering over taking away benefits – financial, therapeutic, health, or otherwise – from survivors of sexual assault, then I do believe that the government needs to redouble its efforts to listen to the voices of the brave Albertans who have spoken out on this topic.

We heard from two women just last week – or maybe it was the week before – who undertook an incredibly brave process to speak publicly about this. They deserve to be heard. They certainly don't deserve to be insulted and smeared on social media by a minister of the Crown.

I would like to see a redoubling of government efforts to address the concerns of survivors, victims' services agencies, front-line workers, and they have an opportunity to do that in this bill and elsewhere.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be any takers for that.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill, and I'll just say up front that my intention at this point is to vote in favour of this bill because I'm not against what it does. Essentially, it does nothing, so how can I object to it? The minister sat down to deal with the issue of sexual assault and did the least he possibly could do, and that's what I want to talk about in this particular situation.

Many of you know that this is a topic that's very dear to my heart. In fact, I was a social worker for some 30 years before I got elected, and my specialization was in the area of family violence, with particular specialization on sexual assault of children. During that time I literally saw thousands of people who had either been assaulted or who had a family member who had been assaulted, and I worked quite extensively with adolescent offenders and worked somewhat with adult offenders as well.

I absolutely think that things need to be done and should be done by this government and could be done. Then I excitedly saw that we were going to be doing something about it in Bill 28 until I read the bill and realized that essentially this is, as I said, absolutely the least that a government could do in response to this particular area. I think it's very performative, doesn't tackle the complex underlying issues on any level whatsoever. It is intended to be able to be held up as having done something when, in fact, nothing has indeed been done at all.

Let's just deal with the issues that are in the bill first, and then we'll move on to the issues that I think are absent from the bill. I think that the very first thing is that the intention of this bill is to prevent convicted sexual offenders from hiding their horrendous behaviour. I want to tell you that I appreciate that the government wants to make sure that you can't change your name and then get away, hide from people by having a different name, so that's why I'll vote for it. But I also want to remind the people of the community that this does not actually protect them in any particular way. You can prevent people from legally changing their name, but there is no law that says that a person must use their legal name on

all of their activities in the community. In fact, you can use any name you want. Anyone in this House, like myself, who has a name that is diminished to a smaller name, like my name, Richard – at a point in my life I was called Rick. [interjections] Oh. I cannot use my own name.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I really did not want to interrupt. However, I think we all know why I did, so if you could please continue.

Mr. Feehan: A person not in this House who was called Richard might also be called Rick, but, you know, there are also various other ways. I know people whose official name is Edward, but they use Ted. Most of us know that those are related, but if you happen to be outside of the country and were not used to that kind of a change, there's nothing about the sound of that name that makes it the same.

4:50

Well, it actually turns out that someone whose name is Richard could actually use the name "Ted" as well, and that's the point here. The point is that it does not prevent a sexual offender from actually using a different name; it only prevents them from legally changing their name. The question is: does that in some way help protect us from predatory offenders? I think that that's very problematic. We know that this only applies to people who have been convicted. If they've been convicted, they have been sentenced, and if they've been sentenced, they are responsible to supervision through parole or probation, and the court orders associated with parole and probation can already identify that an individual has to report to their supervisor any change of address and, of course, any change of name. The system can already keep track of people so that they know if someone is using a name other than their formal name, if they're using any kind of an alias.

The fact that we are putting this into law, to make it formalized and perhaps maybe even to ensure that this indeed does happen, because perhaps it doesn't when it's not formally addressed, is something that I can support, which means that I'll support the bill. But I'm very concerned that the message of this bill is that we are somehow going to make life safer for those of us who live in the community and might have sexual offenders who are a part of our community – and indeed we all do – and I'm very concerned because it does not actually change any realities. This is an empty shell of an attempt to address, I think, a very dangerous issue.

I certainly wish that the government had made the decision to do more and not to do the least that they could do on this particular topic. Just as I was sitting here, for the five minutes before, I wrote down five other ideas that they could have dealt with here. I look at this bill, and do I see them putting any money in place, for example, in terms of putting more money into the investigation of cybercrimes? Do I see them supporting our police officers, as they were talking about earlier this afternoon, in actually establishing larger divisions to look for those online predators, to address those online predators, and to arrest those online predators? I don't see any of that in this bill, so I have to question: if you're really wanting to stop abuse from happening in the first place, if you wanted to act in a preventative way, why wouldn't you have included something along those lines? I could expand on the other areas that you might fund in terms of policing services. I worked very closely with police for many years, and I have deep respect for the work that they do, and I would have loved to have seen them given some support.

I also think that we could have expanded and increased the amount of curriculum that helps children and parents and schools talk about sexual assault. It doesn't really prevent sexual assault

from occurring, I want to remind people, but it certainly helps children to understand when something bad has happened to them and helps them to address that horrendous behaviour to adults who might be able to intervene and stop the abuse from happening and help to protect the children. They could have done that. The minister could have taken the time to say: we are going to sit down with the Minister of Education and we are going to develop a very strong set of curriculum to ensure that children are safe from predators, as much as that is possible in those circumstances.

I certainly know that I've worked extensively with schools and found that teachers are very open to learning about how to do that work and working very closely with children. I absolutely tell you that teachers love the children that they work with and are deeply upset when they've heard that children have been assaulted. The minister could have taken a step to do that kind of work.

The minister could have also said: why don't we make it possible for criminal record checks to be freely and widely available to all employers, to all employees, to all members of nonprofit agencies for their volunteers and their employees so that everybody could do a criminal record check? Anyone who is in my field knows that you're often required to produce a criminal record check in order to work in the field of social work, if you happen to work in a group home, for example, or if you typically are working with children or if you're volunteering. It can be a real experience, especially if you have to do – there are two kind of levels of criminal record checks that are done, and for most of the type of work that we do in social work, you have to get the highest order, where you have to go in, you have to get your thumbprints done, and you have to have an extensive review done just to ensure that you are not an offender. In fact, one time when I did go in to do that, I had to come in for an interview to assure that I wasn't another person with the same first name as mine, which I won't mention again, whose last name was different, though.

I just want to point out the fact that you could have actually used Service Alberta to make it more possible to identify people who are potential offenders in the community by ensuring that criminal record checks are widely available because they are free, because they are important. This isn't just somebody coming in because they, you know, want to get a licence to go fishing. I understand why we charge for that. This isn't somebody coming in for a licence to drive a car, where we want to check to make sure that they're responsible enough to do that. This is preventing child sexual assault.

So why would we put any barrier at all in terms of having criminal record checks? These are all preventative kinds of pieces. I fully understand they would not ultimately, you know, eradicate child sexual abuse from occurring, but they would be pieces that could have been evident in this bill to make it better. Instead, the minister chose to do the most performative piece he could have done, and that very much concerns me.

Other things that they could have done, of course, are dealing more with the consequences of child sexual assault and rape in the community after the fact. They could have said that what we are going to do is that we are going to expand the amount of treatment available for children and adults who have been sexually assaulted. That would have been an incredible thing that I would have been proud to stand up and support here in this House.

I know that when I was in private practice, we charged a rate per hour for people to come and see us to deal with a sexual assault. If you happened to have the support of child welfare, you might have had that paid, but anybody who didn't have that presently available had to pay out of pocket for therapy for their own children, who had been sexually assaulted not by them but by other people in the community. This minister could have added into this bill provisions

to use monies that are available such as the victims of crime fund or other monies available to the provincial government to actually support these children who have been sexually assaulted to ensure that they were able to go into a clinical setting to receive a significant amount of treatment, because we know that treatment after a sexual assault is inevitably a two- or three-year process at least. This government could have chosen to do that work, and I would have been very happy if they had done that.

Just this week I had someone come into my office to talk to me about an issue that happened to them, an incident that happened at their work setting. They had been sexually assaulted as a child and not been able to afford significant treatment when they were a child, and as an adult they are still coping with this experience. At work not too long ago they had an episode, a traumatic response episode, in the work setting, where they were very paralyzed in their situation and needed to be taken off the site because of the circumstances of what was going on. I can tell you that the reason why this person came in to see me is because they said that their employer, while a wonderful employer – they weren't complaining – said that they had no resources for how to deal with this PTSD reaction on-site, that their HR could have used some supports about: what do you do when somebody has this kind of reaction on-site? How do you support them? How do you then deal with them on the work site so that those things will be less likely to come up and they receive the supports that they need to continue to be good employees, because this person is a very good employee who happened to have this episode while they were at work?

5:00

Now, that's something that the Minister of Service Alberta could have included, some extensive training and workshops available for employers across this province to be able to address the victims of childhood sexual assault and their role as an employee. That I would have stood up and been very happy to support, to be able to say: sorry we weren't there to be able to prevent it because we can't always be, but we certainly are going to be there to help you deal with the consequences of it. That's something that would have given me, you know, great pride to stand up and deal with. These are things that happen throughout the province. There is nowhere that is safe, that is immune from this kind of behaviour.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should we see any takers. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to continue with his comments. I knew he had a social work background, but I'd forgotten how intimately he is connected to the issue of sexual violence, particularly around supports for children. I would ask him to continue with his comments.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity. You know, I feel I had said the central part of my argument here, and that is that this bill in its efforts actually doesn't really do a lot. It doesn't change much about the way professionals in the community, the government of Alberta will actually know about who are offenders and where those offenders are located. It doesn't change the fact that the individual can use a different name, just merely that they cannot officially change their name.

I feel that the central concern here is the absence of depth in this particular bill, the absence of actually grappling with a very

complex problem, which I one hundred per cent agree does not have a simple solution. We know that we cannot just simply prevent sexual assault from occurring, but we certainly have to design the structures of our society to reduce the likelihood of sexual assault occurring whenever we possibly can. We have to design the structures of our society to identify when sexual abuse occurs so that we can interfere with it and stop it from occurring as soon as possible. I certainly would support that. We could design the structures of our society to deal with the outcomes and repercussions of sexual assault for the victims who through no fault of their own have been thrust into this place of deep despair and trauma and ultimately posttraumatic stress by providing them the types of supports that are necessary for them to overcome and to move forward.

Now, the research on this is very clear, by the way, that there are experiences that people have that are extremely traumatic and that if people are provided with supports, they can overcome those negative experiences and go on to become happy, healthy, functioning adults. Many people in this room and listening on TV will know people who've been very successful at overcoming deep trauma, whether it happened to be sexual abuse, sexual assault, or other kinds of trauma. But not everybody has the resources and has the supports available to them naturally in their own lives.

Sometimes they need to have structures of supports built around them because their family wasn't able to do it for them; their extended friends weren't able to do it for them. They need society to step up, the government to step up and say: "What happened to you was not your fault. We do not want you to live with the consequences of this traumatic incident in your life forever. We want you to be a happy, functioning adult. As a result, we will employ the strengths and powers of the government of Alberta to ensure that you have the supports that you need to overcome that trauma and to raise the next generation without trauma, to stop the cycle from happening now, to reduce the likelihood of young people becoming offenders, and to reduce the likelihood of young victims becoming adult victims and, instead, move on to a thriving, wonderful experience as an adult with the support of the community around them who understands the position that they were put in and has stood up and said: we are on your side; we believe you, and that means that we take action on your behalf.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 20 seconds left.

Seeing none, are there any hon. members looking to join debate on Bill 28? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 28, the Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020. I think that some of my colleagues here today have spoken quite a bit at length to what our caucus generally believes is a bill that, while perhaps it has an intent that we generally support and perhaps we will be able to support this bill because of it, we have some very serious concerns regarding this government's ability to actually walk the walk when they're talking the talk here.

Yes, the government is right. We should be taking additional steps to try and protect victims of sexual violence, and we should be taking additional steps in doing things like making sure that they're not able to mislead the public and mislead victims and others. We believe that is important. But what we are concerned about, what I am concerned about and perhaps a little bit cynical about, Mr. Speaker, is that the amendment gives powers to the registrar and to vital statistics and to the minister that they already had, right? The minister already had the power to prevent name

changes. The registrar already had powers to prevent name changes in cases where they believed that the intent was to mislead the public, right? It was already in the Vital Statistics Act. It was already a power that the minister had, that the registrar had. Simply, this is an extension, a clarification of that. That's okay. I appreciate that the government does that at times and perhaps would like to strengthen or clarify certain wording in the bill. I think that is something that can be valuable and indeed in this case may actually assist in giving additional direction to the bureaucracy and additional direction to the registrar on who they should or should not allow to change their name.

I think it's concerning that when the Premier did the press conference for this bill, he noted that name changes are not tracked. I think that that's concerning. As Alberta has a publicly available list of high-risk sex offenders, wouldn't the government of Alberta be also tracking those name changes? And if they were tracking those name changes, wouldn't they be co-ordinated with the federal system as well? I think that it's a little bit concerning that the government indicated that during their press release, during the press conference.

I think overall, generally speaking, the intent of the bill is good if not substantive. I think that something that is perhaps more concerning is the lack of actual substantive action, because this government and the minister that introduced this have brought forward this sort of idea that they're going to make sure that this changes everything, and really that's just not the case, right?

My colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford spoke at length about this earlier, but really we do think that you need to do more. You need to actually go out and provide programming, for example, to support persons that have been victims of sexual assault. We need to actually go out and ensure that survivors are safe in their communities and feel safe in their communities. Mr. Speaker, you don't do that by basically giving yourself powers you already had. You don't do that by going in and saying: well, we already had the ability to block these name changes, but now we're going to have double the ability to block these name changes. That doesn't make people feel safer in their communities.

5:10

Indeed, what should have been done is that this government should have committed to funding things like the victims of crime fund. If they were committed to actually funding programs instead of looting from the victims of crime fund, instead of taking money away from victims of crime, if they'd committed to providing things like programming, if they'd committed to providing things like sexual violence programming or gender-based violence programming or bystander intervention programming, whatever it was, Mr. Speaker, if the government had committed to doing any of these things rather than sort of virtue signalling a name change to give themselves powers they already had – Bill 28, to be clear, does not actually expand the scope of government power in any way. It only clarifies the scope of government power. That's a very distinct and important difference. What it actually means is that this government has brought forward legislation here today – again, I think if it has the intent to try and support victims of sexual violence, that is a commendable goal. What they've actually done is that they have brought forward legislation that effectively changes nothing for victims, right? It effectively changes nothing for survivors.

Instead, what this government has done is that they've decided that they are going to take money away from the victims of crime fund, take money away from actual survivors, and then bring this legislation forward and say that they are doing everything they can to prevent sex offenders from changing their name in the public. I

government is going to stand in this place and say that they have made this significant change when they already had those powers. I think it's quite concerning that the ministers will stand in this place and not even explain why they aren't tracking those name changes, Mr. Speaker, and why they aren't co-ordinating those name changes with the federal government. I think all of those things are quite concerning.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think that my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford earlier had spoken to how individuals don't have to go by their legal name either, and that's also something that this government does not address. While they want to speak about how they are doing so much for victims of sexual violence and that this is a piece of that plank, it becomes abundantly clear that the government does not wish to actually fund any of those programs or does not actually want to take any substantive action on those programs. I think that's what's very concerning.

I mean, certainly, something that we haven't even heard significantly from this government on is who they've consulted on this and why they've introduced this piece of legislation and who indeed was having concerns around name changes and why significant name changes were a concern. Mr. Speaker, it seems that the only reason that somebody would request a name change in this case would be if it was to intend to mislead people, right? If a sexual offender, somebody who was convicted of a sexual offence, requested a name change after being released and it was to, let's say, try and move to a neighbourhood that they weren't welcome in or whatever it was or a restricted area that had restrictions on these types of residences, then it would be clearly the case that the sexual offender would be intending to mislead members of the public. That would be very clearly the case. If a sexual offender decided to change their name to try and circumvent some sort of restriction or to try and circumvent some sort of residency requirement, then it becomes abundantly clear that that circumvention by itself is by nature and by definition misleading of members of the public. The minister already had that power. The registrar already had that power. The government already is required to basically not allow people who intend to mislead the public and use the changing of their name to mislead the public to do so.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's just not very clear to me what additional measures this government is actually taking to support victims. What is clear to me is what this government is not doing to support victims. What this government is not doing to support victims is continuing to fund the victims of crime fund. We saw already in this place that the government is reducing the amount of monies available for victims of crime. They're taking it and using it for other programs. We saw in this place that they are reducing the grants to the programs that support victims of sexual violence. What we can see in this place, what we can see in this bill is that while this government likes to talk the talk about how they are doing all these programs and introducing this legislation, indeed this government does not actually want to make substantive change. This government does not actually want to implement programs, does not actually want to implement services, does not actually want to implement legislation that would actually support survivors, would actually support victims of crime, would actually support victims of sexual violence. I think that's pretty disappointing.

It's pretty disappointing because members of this government will speak to why this is so great and why they think it's so important that we should not be allowing these name changes, why we should not be allowing high-risk sex offenders to change their

names, but they will not even justify or explain why the government is not tracking name changes. They will not even justify or explain why the government is not co-ordinating around the name changes. Really, Mr. Speaker, it becomes clear that this is simply a distraction, a distraction that this government is trying to introduce to hide the fact that they are not actually doing any programming, any grants, any actual supports for victims of crime, any actual supports for victims of sex offenders, or anything of that kind.

Yes, they can go in and say, "Well, this will make communities feel safer," but, again, Mr. Speaker, the government already had that power. The government already should have been exercising its powers in that way. The government should have already been utilizing its discretion to not approve these misleading name changes. It should not have been allowing people to change their names who are intentionally trying to mislead the public.

Mr. Speaker, I'm actually going to read the existing legislation for you so that we can see the difference that the amendment brings forward. In the existing legislation we can see:

- (b) in the Registrar's opinion the proposed name might
 - (i) reasonably be expected to cause confusion,
 - (ii) be a cause of embarrassment to any person,
 - (iii) be used in a manner that could defraud or mislead the public, or
 - (iv) be objectionable on any other grounds.

Those are the grounds that the registrar is already allowed to use to not permit name changes. I think that pretty clearly it is used in a manner that could defraud or mislead the public, and also I think it's pretty clear that it would be objectionable on many grounds. That's why we're in this place debating this right now. The registrar and the government had this ability.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment, I believe, reads:

- (1.1) The Registrar shall refuse to register a name proposed under Part 3 if the person for whom the applicant is requesting the change of name is 18 years of age or older and has been convicted of a designated offence.

Great. The government has basically said: "With these clauses that we already think are bad, we shouldn't allow them to change their name. Well, we should additionally not let them change their name if they have committed one of these designated offences, and in this case we know them to be sexual offences." Mr. Speaker, that's great. It's clarifying language. It strengthens legislation, sure.

What it doesn't do is that it doesn't show that this government is actually committing to making change, it doesn't show that this government is actually committing to investing in our communities, and it doesn't show that this government is actually committing to trying to support survivors of sexual violence and support the victims of sexual offenders. It shows that this government, instead of actually going out and doing any of the programming, instead of actually going out and funding the programs, instead of actually going out and running real initiatives that could help people, Mr. Speaker, and investing in communities, instead of doing any of those things, we see pretty clearly that this government has decided to try and distract the public, to try and distract Albertans by using verbiage that is simply there to reiterate what the government already should be doing, right?

If the government isn't doing that, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the government needs to explain why they are not. If the government is allowing sexual offenders to change their names to be used in a manner that could defraud or mislead the public, if that is indeed the case – and the government perhaps is implying that that may have been the case in the past – then the government would need to explain why they are already not following their own legislation, right? It's pretty clear legislation. If a sexual offender tries to change their name to intentionally mislead or defraud the public, it

would be very clear that those sex offenders would already be in violation of the existing legislation even without this bill, Bill 28, so the government would need to explain why they are allowing that to happen.

Why would they be allowing that to happen? We don't know, Mr. Speaker, because the government hasn't provided evidence of this in the past. The government hasn't provided the list of consultations. The government hasn't provided any of this information, so we don't know. It clearly is something that this Assembly is not able to make a judgment on right now, and that's just a reality that we're left in.

It seems that this government is more interested in introducing legislation that basically does nothing. They're more interested in introducing legislation that basically does nothing and gives them more talking points, Mr. Speaker, gives them more opportunities to go out and spout off to the public rather than actually trying to do the work and invest, rather than actually trying to do the hard work of government and try and ensure that Albertans are actually safe in their communities, are actually better provided for in their communities, are actually able to have the supports that they need, particularly for these victims.

Mr. Speaker, we see again that it's very obvious that this government is continuing to defund the victims of crime, is continuing to take away from actual services that would've gone to these victims and survivors. Instead, what they are doing now is using a typical boilerplate to try and distract from that record. I think it's disappointing. I think it's disappointing that they're trying to distract from the record because Albertans are going to be able to see through this, right? Albertans actually understand that when you want to support survivors, when you want to support victims of sexual offences, you actually need to go in and have real programs and real services.

5:20

It turns out, Mr. Speaker, that programs and services cost money, right? It turns out that we need to actually invest in these communities, we need to invest in our survivors, and we need to invest in the services for them. It turns out that this government is defunding that. It's taking money away. It's actually taking money out of these services, and that's what I believe Bill 28, the Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, is doing. It's trying to distract from that misuse and detraction from the actual services.

I think the government is trying to distract from this actual programming that they have failed to support and the victims they have failed to support. I think that's pretty disappointing. I think it's something that we've come to see as a pattern from this government. This government says that they are doing one thing, on one hand, but in reality, when we actually look at the legislation, when we look at the funding, when we look at the budgets, when we look at what this government is actually doing that is supposed to be helping Albertans, we see nothing, right?

Albertans see that they are actually seeing fewer services. Albertans are seeing that they receive less support, that their communities hurt more, and indeed that families are getting less and survivors are getting less. That's what we're seeing time and time again. I think it's pretty disappointing. I think it's a pattern from this government. I think it's something that we'll have a lot more to say about, but I see my time has expired here, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I commend the intent, but I think it's a shame.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to second reading on Bill 28. I just wanted to take a few minutes to maybe set the record straight a little bit on some of the comments . . .

The Speaker: I might just interject momentarily, hon. member. We are on Standing Order 29(2)(a). If you would like to provide a brief question or comment under Standing Order 29(2)(a), you're welcome to do that. I just wanted to make sure that you were aware that there is only a five-minute time for a brief question or comment and that you weren't speaking to the main bill.

Mrs. Allard: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a) I just wanted to address some of the things that have been said this afternoon around what this government is doing. I don't think it's, you know, insignificant when we're making changes that strengthen the law. Convicted sex offenders must live under their own names as we strengthen the protections around this loophole that currently exists today. Alberta already has some of the strongest legislation around name changes, and these changes will make it even stronger. I don't think that that's a bad thing.

I'm happy to hear that members opposite are planning to support the bill. It's just disappointing to hear that they think that this isn't supportive of victims when we hear from victims that it is. Certainly, victims that have experienced this kind of violence, you know, are saying to us that they're happy about these changes, that they're happy that we're closing this loophole, that it's important that we do this work, that any effort that we can make is a significant effort.

There are some famous perpetrators on the public record that have used this loophole, maybe not here in Alberta, but they've used this loophole to the detriment of society. Karla Homolka comes to mind. She has changed her name multiple times. Certainly, a famous offender and somebody that we would not want to see have access to children in Alberta under an alias or a different name. So I don't think it's insignificant to talk about what we're doing here in terms of closing a loophole for potential offenders to perpetrate again or to hide in the communities where they live. I think that it's important for those offenders that they have to live under the name that they were given as much as their victims unfortunately have to live. It's a life sentence as a victim. You don't get a choice whether you get to hide from that, right?

Other things I wanted to talk about. There are a number of amendments that further strengthen our commitment to helping survivors of sexual assaults and ensuring that convicted sex offenders cannot hide in their communities, as I was saying. It follows previous actions such as passing Clare's law. I hope that Mr. Speaker will give some latitude since there's been a lot of latitude given this afternoon as we've spoken to Bill 28.

There are a number of other initiatives this government has taken to support survivors and protect survivors of human trafficking as well. This indirectly helps support a commitment and investment that we're making, and these amendments follow actions our government has taken on other files. This is just one step. This is just one step we can take to try and protect our children. It will not curb instinct in these offenders, but it will mean they can't hide, and I think that's very significant. We want to make sure that we are standing with victims and that we are standing up for survivors and that we want to close every loophole possible. This is just one other effort that we're making to do that. We must do everything we can to protect them and increase their safety.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's approximately a minute and 45 left under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's interesting that the member opposite rose in this place and tried to tout the record of this government because it is abundantly clear to Albertans that the record of this government is poor and is a failing grade at best. What this government has actually done is that they have defunded the victims of crime fund, and now indeed this government member who has risen in this place to defend themselves has not even been able to give an example in Alberta where this is necessary. Indeed, this is a power the government already had. If the government member had bothered to read the bill, they would know that.

What this is indeed is a distraction, Mr. Speaker. It's a distraction to detract from their terrible track record, to detract from how this government has done nothing to support victims of crime, is doing nothing to support victims of crime, and indeed is making their lives harder every single day, whether it's a victim of a sex offender, reducing their services, their ability to access things like counselling, their ability to access things like programming. Indeed, while the intent and statement of this bill are good, what this government and the government members clearly do not understand is that you actually must put the money where your mouth is, that you must actually go in and do the work and provide the services.

Indeed, this government is not doing that. This government has failed in every single aspect. This government and the government Member for Grande Prairie, who has just risen, has failed to actually understand the implications of that, has failed to understand that it is not enough to simply introduce fancy words in this place, Mr. Speaker, that indeed you must actually fund the programs, you must actually support the services, you must actually allow Albertans access to counselling, you must actually allow them to have the different programming. That is what we are here to talk about. That is why we are here in this place, and it is disappointing and it is shameful that this government will get up in this place and try to defend such an abysmal track record.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate at second reading of Bill 28? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 28, Vital Statistics (Protecting Albertans from Convicted Sex Offenders) Amendment Act, 2020. You know, I'm joining the debate a little bit late this afternoon, but I have been listening. I guess, in behind there, just with COVID rules. One of the themes that seems to be coming up is government members talking about that this piece of legislation will protect survivors or victims. I really hate to call them victims because I think it's a label that sticks with you for your entire life when you are a victim. They are survivors. I would like to speak to that a little bit.

I think that this piece of legislation, or this amendment, may actually take care of a problem that exists in some cases, where somebody chooses to try to change their name to hide from something or to hide from crimes that they've committed or been charged with or been convicted of. You know, in that case if it does keep somebody in the future safe, that's great. I think that we've said that every time, whether it was speaking to a private member's bill about having EpiPens in schools. I think the comment then was that if it saves one life, that's great. If it changes somebody's life for the better, that's great.

But I do take offence – not offence. I am bothered by some of the statements that this helps survivors. This may prevent more victims from being created – definitely – but this does not help survivors. Indeed, what the Member for Grande Prairie noted is that having this label or being a survivor of these crimes really is like a life sentence because it impacts your life for the rest of your life. It not only impacts your life; it impacts the relationships that you have with other people. It certainly has an impact on your children if you choose to have them. It is essentially a life sentence, and when I hear the government members stand up and talk about how great this work has been for survivors of these kinds of crimes, I think that you need to recognize that you've fallen short.

5:30

If this is the piece of legislation that you're waving your flag about that says that you stood up to support survivors of these kinds of crimes, I just don't understand that. I really don't. You've looked at a piece of legislation. You've looked at a loophole that could have potentially been taken care of somewhere else, some other way, whether it's in regulation – I mean, this government does it for every other topic I can think of, where they'll pass very broad legislation and then say: don't worry about it; we'll take care of it in regulation. So I really don't understand this move.

But I would like to say that this is really pitiful when you look at the entire need of survivors. This is a piece that will prevent future crimes, hopefully, but this is pitiful in the grand scheme of supporting people – women, children, men – that have survived these kinds of crimes. What they need are things that this government has methodically attacked. In our short time here, you've methodically attacked – one specific piece of legislation was the victims of crime. Now, we've heard again and again government members stand up and say: "Don't worry. It'll be fine. We're going to consult. It'll be A-okay." Yet you have the professionals – the experts like the umbrella organization that represents, I think, over 50 organizations, victims' services that represent people that do this volunteer work all across the province then have come out publicly together and said: this is not good; this is going to hamper our ability to support survivors. That's not how you support survivors. That is not how you do it.

For the government members to say that Bill 28, this changing of vital statistics in order to prevent crime – that's great. If it prevents one crime from happening, that's great. If it prevents the creation of one more survivor, that is great. But that's not good enough. That's not good enough. Victims of crime, survivors of crime, particularly these kinds of crimes – and there are far too many of them – need support. They need support immediately following. They need financial support. Maybe they need housing support. Maybe they need income support. They most definitely need therapy and counselling. They most definitely need therapy and counselling for their children if that is the case. They need these kinds of investments, and the vast majority of Albertans don't have the resources to secure those things on their own.

By systematically cutting public services the way they have been cut – now, I know government will say: no, we didn't cut anything. Well, you have, and you did. I can give you an example. I know that I speak frequently about people with disabilities in Alberta. I can tell you about women with disabilities in Alberta. There is a very real possibility that most women in this province who have disabilities will experience some kind of abuse in their lifetime. That is the sad reality, and that is a sad fact. Very often, those survivors – that abuse comes at the hands of caregivers, often family members, who they're reliant on. Sometimes it is staff. They're left picking up the pieces afterwards. This is a group that typically, when they do work, don't have high-paying jobs. Often they rely

on things like assured income for the severely handicapped or income support, and that means a life of poverty.

For these women or, in some cases, men – and I'm speaking specifically about adults – to try to secure therapy or counselling after something like this is next to impossible because they don't have the money. They have to go on enormous wait-lists for services for therapists or counsellors that have the ability to work with them, that have some expertise working with people that have survived these kinds of assaults or these kinds of crimes. The wait-lists are huge. They're huge. They're massive. And they're limited. There are only so many sessions that they can have. For example, people that get staffing support through persons with developmental disabilities: last I heard, I think there were two psychologists in the capital region, serving thousands of people. You can imagine the wait-list. I've heard of people waiting on that list for over a year. Those are the kinds of investments that survivors need.

Certainly, do all you can to close loopholes in legislation to prevent people from changing their names so they don't go on to harm other people because they changed their name and it's sneaky and they're hiding. For sure, do that. Do it however you need to do it. But if you truly want to say that you are supporting survivors or you're doing everything that you can to support survivors, then make those investments and do that hard work. That means respecting the victims of crime fund. That's what it's called, victims of crime fund. It was created specifically for victims of crime. That money was put there, was amassed for victims of crime, not to pay for other policing initiatives that this government has promised Albertans. It was put there for victims of crime, yet this government has seen fit to raid that to pay for other things that they're choosing not to pay for.

I think that, certainly, if you want to wave your flag and yeehaw that you did this, that you are supporting victims of crime, that's fine. This is just one little, tiny piece. I might say yeehaw or yahoo or whatever. It doesn't matter. You know, it's the same: all cowboy, no horse. But I think that if you are truly going to say that you are doing everything that you can to support victims of crime, survivors of crime, then you have to do more than just the bare minimum, which is saying that, you know, you're closing a loophole that you all – let's be honest – could have done through regulation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I know that some of my colleagues have some thoughts to add, so I'll take my seat.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or a comment under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise, of course, under 29(2)(a) to respond to the previous speaker. I appreciate the comments that they raised in respect of the importance of this legislation or, from what we can see, some of the changes that are being proposed by the Minister of Service Alberta, and we appreciate those changes. While we have raised some of our concerns about the fact that it may have been able to be done through different measures, whether it's through regulations or what have you, the fact is that this legislation is before the House now. We appreciate that what is offered in it in principle is something that we think we can support, and I believe I will as well.

I just wanted to point out from the actual release from the government – it starts off by saying:

Proposed changes to the Vital Statistics Act would require anyone 18 years of age or older to submit to a criminal background check as part of their application to change their name.

That's something that's been shared often through the debate today. It goes on to say:

Those convicted of designated sexual offences under the Criminal Code will be ineligible . . .

That has been brought up as well. It goes on to say:

Alberta already has some of the strongest legislation around name changes and these proposed changes will make it even stronger.

Well, that's good to hear. It goes on to say:

Under existing rules, anyone applying for a legal change of name in Alberta must be fingerprinted and submit an RCMP fingerprint confirmation letter with their application.

Through that release alone, it's saying that we are doing something that we already did previously. So while I appreciate that the minister is bringing this forward and saying that it's strengthening the legislation and it's closing loopholes, I would appreciate, once again, if the minister was able to stand up and speak to some of those loopholes that they believe are currently in place that weren't addressed through the previous legislation.

I can also appreciate some of the advocacy groups and organizations that have come forward to show their support for this legislation, and I thank them for coming forward and sharing their thoughts and opinions.

Now, I would have appreciated a more fulsome consultation process on this. The minister and government went on to some extent to say that this was, once again, something that was needed, as did these groups, but we're still waiting for specific answers on exactly: of the 4,000 Alberta residents completing legal name changes in our province each year, potentially how many of these were for reasons that the government believes they shouldn't have been allowed to do? I would love to get an answer for that.

Going on, the idea of: if this is happening, why was it handled before? Another concern being: if this has happened in the past, what are we doing to rectify the fact that people were able to do that previously, and what happens with those people that did? Are there any changes to come? This legislation: is anything retroactive about it? Those are thoughts that I have.

Once again, I appreciate the previous member's thoughts about the importance of recognizing that within the disability community this is an issue that happens even more often than in other segments of the population, and we need to ensure that we are supporting those survivors no matter their ability.

5:40

Once again I would reflect on the idea that while this is something that we can support, we've seen previously, whether it be through the changes of the victims of crime fund and the Justice minister's talking points about strengthening it – but at the same time, from what we can tell and from what nonprofit organizations across the province who support these victims of crime seem to be sharing with the government and with the opposition, there is no money earmarked within what the minister has changed to actually ensure that more money is going to make it to those survivors. What the minister has said from his own mouth is that funding will be spent on prosecutors and increased policing, but the fact is that we haven't heard him – well, maybe he said that more will go to survivors of violence, but we haven't seen that. It's not in the legislation. There's no money earmarked.

We even tried to pass amendments as the opposition to ensure that more of that funding would be earmarked for these victims and these survivors of crime and these witnesses of crime because it is extremely important that as we start taking money away from certain programs or moving that money to different programs, there's transparency, and that is not something that we've seen coming from this government. While the public in general has

spoken out against the changes in Bill 16 and to the victims of crime fund, we heard basically nothing from this government to reassure us that extra funding would be spent on education, that extra funding would be spent on counselling for these people, who need support more than ever at that time of need. It's very frustrating.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on second reading of Bill 28. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the members who spoke prior to me for articulating, I think, some very useful points in today's debate. I want to affirm that like my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I too will be supporting this bill. As he said in his remarks, this bill doesn't move things backwards, and fortunately – well, not fortunately – some days that's what we can hope for, I guess, that we're not making negative progress on issues. Certainly, I think a lot of people have highlighted the desire to have more actual progress on issues, but the bill that we're debating today, the vital statistics amendment act, 2020, I don't think moves us backwards. I think that in some regard some might assert that it will potentially move us forward. I would like to see more action and fewer press releases and creative titles for bills.

One of the questions that I have, that the prior speaker from Edmonton-West Henday just highlighted and, I think, relates to what I want to ask, is that currently it's our understanding that under the Vital Statistics Act it's already possible for the registrar to object to somebody changing their name if they believe that the individual is misleading the public or if the registrar sees any other objectionable grounds. That seems like a pretty broad ability to refuse somebody changing their name, so I would imagine that this is something that could have been clearly communicated without this requirement for additional legislation.

One of the other pieces that I've been thinking about with the additional requirements and a criminal record check – and I support access to criminal record checks. I would like to see us make progress to make them free in this province. I think that there are parents who regularly want to volunteer in schools where a criminal record check is required. I think that's a good thing, but that is certainly taking away the agency from a number of parents who would like to be able to volunteer if it's a financial barrier to them. We know that there are families right throughout our province where paying that extra money to be able to get a criminal record check to be able to accompany your child and other people's children on a field trip could very well be a barrier. I would love to see us take steps in this place, through legislation, through the budget, to take away some of those barriers to active participation for people who don't have criminal records. Being able to get the check to be able to prove that you don't have a criminal record sometimes can be a barrier. That is one area where I would like to see us invest more when it comes to vital statistics and making that information available.

I also want to reiterate that some folks talked about how, on the eve of this bill coming forward, the government had just intentionally made significant changes to the victims of crime compensation fund and the victims of crime fund.

One thing I want to say – and I think I've probably said it in this place before, but I think it bears repeating. Sometimes ministers go to their officials and say: "I need some ideas on ways we can save some money. Times are really tough. Let's find some ideas on how we can scrape some cash together in this department." Rightfully so, the public service comes with a whole whack of recommendations, not because they want you to make these changes but because you've said: I need to save some money; what

are some ways we can do that? I really compel private members and cabinet ministers alike to say: were these ideas recommended to any prior government? That was one of the first questions I usually asked. Were any of these ideas recommended, and if they said no to them, what are some of the reasons that they did?

It's a nice way to sort of cut through some of the cloud of fog that's sometimes around these things because very quickly you would have been notified that we thought it was a really bad idea to take money away from victims of crime. We thought that it was not the right message and definitely not the right outcome for people who've already been traumatized to then see their government take funds away from what was identified decades prior as an important method to ensure that survivors get the supports and due compensation they are rightfully owed, things like paying for a funeral service for a child who was killed, things like paying for counselling services for somebody who was a victim of sexual assault and has survived that. That's one thing I wanted to say.

I'm going to tell a story about a very recent situation in my riding. For anyone who's triggered by hearing about sexual assault, I want to give that warning now. I won't go into the details or the names, but I will tell you that there was a child in the riding that I represent who was picked up and who, reports say, was assaulted at knifepoint, that the assault was quite brutal, and the child was dropped off a few blocks away. Survived. The person who has been charged with that assault was in the remand for a while and then was later released to the custody of a family member under house arrest.

I have to ask the question: if we properly funded remand and other areas of the justice system, would that have happened? Would there have been that desire to release somebody into house arrest, back in the community? I imagine that there are many pressures that the judiciary is considering when making these decisions, but let me tell you that the person who was charged was released into custody less than 200 metres from where the survivor lived. Less than 200 metres. Understandably, the community was duly upset when notified that this person who was identified by police as being at increased risk – I don't think there's anything funny, members opposite, to this story. Certainly, if there are jokes that want to be told, I think that you have every right to discuss those at other times, but I think this is a very traumatic situation, and I would appreciate if the Member for Calgary-Klein at least pretended to pay attention instead of laughing.

This child lives in a neighbourhood with other children, and there is somebody who had been charged very nearby. As a response a lot of members of the community and members from outside the community started doing quite visible and vocal protests outside the home that the individual was released to. They were loud; they were disturbing. Understandably, people wanted to protect themselves and each other from what the police had identified as being somebody who was of greater risk to the community than standard.

Fortunately, through advocacy and through persistence the police did eventually have more oversight on that site and a visible presence. It took a few days, though. Again, the police are working very short-handed. In the interim there were some really unhealthy interactions in the community, so the family of the child who had been assaulted asked that the protests be moved outside of the neighbourhood. The community league reinforced the family's request. Of course, not just was that individual survivor and their experience to be taken into consideration, but the whole community felt unsafe, and the whole community was trying to prevent another sexual assault from happening or another abduction from happening. The whole community felt a greater sense of anxiety than, in my experience having represented this community, it ever had in the past.

What are the pressures on police? What are the pressures on remand? Shouldn't we in this place and outside this place, in our caucus meetings and other advocacy alike, be advocating for the right resources to make sure that our communities, our survivors, and all of us feel safe? Putting something into legislation that, arguably, the registrar already has the ability to do might make for a creative title on a bill. I don't think it moves things backwards, but I don't think it does the important work of moving us forward. I really don't.

5:50

To this young constituent and her family and everyone who cares about her: I think we owe them better. I think that we owe them a true and proper investment in enforcement as well as the justice system as well as what some have talked about in this space, too, around education. I think that having a full and proper review and addressing questions around consent and assault in the curriculum is fundamental to making sure that we create a society where all of us can not just feel safe but can be safe. I know that there are some folks out there. Some of them have reached out to me, saying, you know: "In this new culture of consent I'm really worried for my boys and what that might mean for them. Maybe one day they'll be accused of not respecting somebody's boundaries." Girls as well, I'm sure. I think if we have proper education, if we have good discussions about what enthusiastic consent means, we can definitely help ensure that all children in our province and, therefore, all Albertans eventually, should they choose to stay here, have a good understanding of what appropriate boundaries are, how they can advocate for their own safety and well-being, and if somebody breaches those, how they can get appropriate support.

I think that that is what often people who focus on the vulnerable are counting on, that we as a society won't properly educate and support people with disabilities on how to be able to say no, how to be able to get the right supports if something bad does happen, and how to be able to ensure that they are safe and respected and that their bodily autonomy is upheld by all citizens. I used bodily autonomy in other debates as well, now that I think about it, but the concept is the same: having the ability to make decisions about your own body and being able to ensure that people will respect those and act in a way that honours who you are.

I think the part that is in parentheses in the title – I would love for us to bring forward a bill that does a lot to protect Albertans from convicted sex offenders, and I think that that is far more substantial than this small amendment that we are considering here today. Again, I don't think that the amendment is a move backwards, so I'm willing to support it, but I think that there is so much more that we can and we should be doing in this place, with the responsibilities that have been entrusted to all of us, to ensure that little girls like the one in my riding don't have increased incidence of sexual assault in their communities.

I have to say that if the person who abducted the child would have said, "Hi, my name is Karla Homolka," I don't think that would have stopped her from getting in that vehicle or being abducted and put in that vehicle. I think that that is a very surface assumption. While I certainly don't want anyone to ever feel that they are in a position where they're vulnerable or they're being assaulted, I think that saying that simply because somebody can't legally change their name and therefore everyone will magically have greater protections and be safer is a falsity. I do appreciate that we're having some conversations about survivors and how we can support them, but I think that there is far more that we need to be engaging in in the actual investments in keeping our communities and one another safe.

Those are the bulk of the points that I wanted to raise with regard to that today and to say that I appreciate the conversation that's being had. I think that I personally can support this bill, but I do hope that there are other bills that come forward that are far more weighty in our ability to actually protect folks.

Thank you.

The Speaker: 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, and thanks to the minister for bringing this forward. I normally don't get up and talk about things that I don't know much about even though some of the members opposite like to try to give me a jab here and there to hear what my opinion is, but what has become evidently apparent here is that any Tom, Dick, or Harry can stand up and start chirping about what should be done better. Normal process in here is to put an amendment forward if there is something of an actionable item.

The other thing that becomes vastly apparent to me is that most of the members opposite have worked in this field of social services and dealing with a lot of these items. There is no way that I could, given my personality, given that I have four kids at home, Mr. Speaker, three of which are daughters. I can rest assured that there would be no legislation that would keep an individual safe from me, from the wrath of a father, neither heaven nor hell nor on this Earth if my kids were ever one of these victims. This hits me so hard because it strikes so close to home, and being a father that wants to watch out for his kids and also for the community, I find it extremely disingenuous that individuals from members opposite would come up with an idea that we from the government side of caucus would think that we're halfway going through this, that we're just doing this for some measure.

I'm looking at letters from the Saskatchewan government. They were the first ones in Canada to bring this forward, some simple steps and measures, again, to try to progressively move forward on this item, on this bill. The members opposite had four years. With all their knowledge, their vast support, and actually being the government, they could have bolstered everything up. Instead, they choose to criticize and pick away at what someone is doing, taking the steps to move forward. Our minister is a brand new father. Guaranteed this is genuine and from the bottom of his heart to try to do something to help these poor kids. I find it shameful that you would take that approach, quite frankly, given your past experience and where you're at. [interjections] I'll speak through the chair because obviously that's too close to what the truth is for you.

The government of Saskatchewan is definitely supportive of this. The Sheldon Kennedy survivors advocate has supportive comments, and his were: "Every day a survivor struggles with the shame and guilt that needs to try and take control of negative places, their thoughts. They think of suicide. This becomes normal." Child advocacy centres, they're supportive of this. They're thinking this is a great first step. Obviously, there's more work to be done. Cheryl Diebel from the Zebra Child Protection Centre: again, she's supportive of this. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. Reading some of these comments, again, it starts to hit pretty close to home, thinking of my little girls.

You've got the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association. They're supportive of this. It just says, you know, quote, unquote, "I think this is a wonderful thing; I was unaware of this loophole" and thinks it's something to be done that's long-needed in the protection of children. Again, what our minister has done through this and other bills is that he has taken direct action. He hasn't pontificated and stood back and waited. He's actually taking steps and moving it forward. Is it the be-all and end-all and the silver bullet? Heck, no.

But we're taking obviously measured steps to make sure this goes forward.

The government of Saskatchewan, as I'd mentioned, the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council: they're cautiously supportive. Again, in conversation with some of the members they said that this link is a good start, and they're happy and encouraged that other provinces and territories are taking similar actions.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we must do everything to protect our children and vulnerable Albertans. Prohibiting convicted sex offenders from being able to legally change their names is just one simple step that we can take to ensure that Albertans are safe, secure, and protected in their communities. It's unacceptable that these sex offenders are currently able to change their names for a legal name and hide their past. We're proposing to change that,

again, to make it more difficult for these predatory individuals in our society.

Survivors of sexual violence have to live with the effects of this. I think that all members can agree on that. We want to help try to prevent these acts from taking place in the first place. Again, if someone should be guilty of these things, the last thing we want to do is give them an opportunity to hide. We're making changes to the Vital Statistics Act in regulation to prohibit the convicted sex offenders from being able to legally change their names.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 3(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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