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The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 15, 2017

Day 54

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Let us bow and reflect or pray, each in our own way. Let us be mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents, for our province, and for each other. I hope that this work gives all members the strength and the wisdom that we all need during our deliberations, supporting each other and building relationships every day.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to move third and final reading of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances.

Mr. Speaker, in this time that this bill has been in front of the Assembly, I have heard from many Albertans about how important this legislation is to them. I heard from students who shared their stories about how their GSAs have helped them become comfortable with their own lives and in their own skin and teens who have written passionately about their own stories coming out and how GSAs gave them the community of support that they needed to make that brave journey. I've heard from parents who have seen how GSAs have helped their children, and I'm grateful for the positive impact that these clubs have had on the health and the well-being of their children. I want to thank those Albertans for reaching out and sharing those stories of support.

I have also heard from some Albertans with questions and concerns about the legislation. Our government knows that parents love and support their children, and this legislation will simply make sure that students are the ones who decide when and how to have those deeply personal and important conversations with their parents and their loved ones.

If a student's safety is at risk, parents will be notified. GSAs are not covert sexual education classes, as some people have very wrongly suggested. Health lessons are taught in health class. GSAs are peer-support groups. They are safe havens for young people who need that safe place.

What this legislation does is make it clear that all schools that receive public dollars must provide a welcoming, caring, safe, and respectful learning environment and that no student will be outed for joining a GSA. Students will still be able to ask their teachers and other school personnel for help if they're in trouble, of course, and/or want support when they have these conversations with their parents. One of our government's top priorities is ensuring students' safety, and that's why GSAs are so important. For some students GSAs are the only place where they feel safe and appreciated. I want to maintain the integrity of that position.

I'm extremely disappointed to see unanimous opposition from the members of the Official Opposition who were present for our

votes on this bill at each stage of passing. We all know that this bill will protect the lives of some of the most vulnerable citizens we have, children and youth. We need to stand up for them and not out them. I hope that today's debate convinces the members opposite to look past their partisan allegiances and take a stand in supporting LGBTQ youth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to third reading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a responsibility to listen to our children. Gay-straight alliances or queer-straight alliances are student-led and staff-supported organizations that promote the creation of peer-support networks and foster welcoming and caring and respectful, safe environments for LGBTQ2-plus students and their allies. Having a GSA in a school reduces suicidal ideation for both LGBTQ2-plus identified youth and those who are straight.

The question we have to ask ourselves is: what is truly important? Well, GSAs are important, and they're necessary. We have, in fact, on our entire side of this caucus said that. The entire Legislature agrees with ensuring that there are no mandatory notifications as to whether a child is in a GSA. We all completely agree. To create the environment where bullying is not accepted – we honour antibullying week this week for those exact reasons.

I'd like to speak about bullying a little bit, actually, and I'd like to share some correspondence with the House. One of the quotes is: I watched, and then I watched her walk out and not vote; how much homophobia are you going to excuse until you, too, wear the label? The second one: she is paid to vote, not to hide. These are the people that you are exposing our vulnerable children to, people who are offended because we ask legitimate questions, Mr. Speaker, about the safety of our children, all of our children. You know what is important? Standing up for our children and for our youth and asking questions even if they're difficult questions.

I have never in my life had to prove that I'm an ally. I don't have to tell people that I'm an ally, and I certainly do not need to prove in this House that I'm an ally. If the government wants to attack me or anybody else just for the sake of attacking, by all means that is your right. Attacking one's character has been the overwhelming method of this government and using every single methodology to do that. Honestly, if you want to admonish me or my caucus for our votes, that is your right, Mr. Speaker, but it does nothing to help move us forward. Nothing.

You can call me whatever you want. You can certainly try. You can even say that if I come near any pride events, you will out me. I would love to actually know what that means, Mr. Speaker. Maybe somebody can clarify that for me.

These are the people you want influencing our youth, the people who are saying those things? That's not bullying at all, is it, Mr. Speaker? Not at all. These are the friends that you want to have coming in to help the youth work together? These are common bullies, the kinds of people that we want to protect our children from. The government, just because they call themselves allies, that makes their attacks okay? In what world is that okay? Literally I have to ask myself – I mean, this is ridiculous: the behaviour, the mistruths, the lack of common sense. You may not tell me whether or not I can attend pride, or did you forget that we live in a free society? Maybe you've forgotten that. You may not tell me whether or not I can go. In fact, I've been there for years, long before I was a politician.

I stand here in front of all of you now. Let me be clear. I will never vote for any government, mine or yours, to influence a student-led organization ever, any GSAs. GSAs are supposed to be

student led, not government led. I will actually stand up for these kids, for their rights and their ability to have a club that is created by them for the reasons that they needed one, not for what politicians want. Neither you nor me come in and set a standard as to how a GSA is going to work. They already have this autonomy, Mr. Speaker. They're already above the School Act. They're outside of it. Why would you even consider bringing the School Act into something that is already autonomous and has the ability to run on its own, run by the students? These kids need the space to do this themselves. They already have a GSA director to help them with their club, and that is their person. That's their go to.

Instructional time, indicated in section 50.1(1) of the School Act, is not presently part of the GSAs, and that's a good thing. I can't for the life of me figure out why the government is opening this club up to instructional time. That has nothing to do with the GSA. How can you ensure students' safety by doing that? That is what the minister just said: to ensure student safety. How is that possible if the GSA is no longer run just by the students, for the students, on behalf of the students?

A GSA is a peer support, antibullying club, and it's already out of the scope of the School Act. It is a club. If the government wants to change that, then it should state those intentions clearly. State them clearly. Create a new bill, Mr. Speaker. Create a new bill to amend the School Act with the appropriate consultation, outreach, and debate that a change of this magnitude would require. If you did that, I could respect that. But to do it under this bill that states for the record that for some reason if we don't vote for it, we're voting against GSAs? That is not true.

9:10

We already believe in GSAs. We already support the present legislation, and I actually would have voted for this legislation if that would have been amended, happily, and I've stated that for the record. No government or other organizations of any stripe should be able to walk into a student-led organization, Mr. Speaker, and begin to influence students as it sees fit. You know what? I know the government is going to think that that's just pointed at them. I don't want my government going in there either. No government should ever have the ability to do that. There is no good reason to exempt GSAs from something that they're not part of in the first place.

I've spoken to so many constituents and teachers and principals and students and GSA directors and parents, and the one thing that we can all agree on is that we want safe and caring spaces for our students in their schools.

The issue around Bill 24, in that section, is that that section deals with the rights of parents to be informed. If the government wants to deal with that section, bring it out separately. Let's debate it here in the Legislature and look at the School Act separately. If that's the way the government wants to go, Mr. Speaker, that's what you do. You don't hide it in another piece of legislation.

Voluntary student organizations referred to as GSAs could allow any government via this section – any government – to be able to go in and influence a student-led organization. Why does the government want to seek that? Why would they want, if for some reason they're not in government in the future, that some other government could do that for any of their own purposes? This is so wrong, Mr. Speaker. It's completely contradictory to what this legislation is supposed to do in the first place.

These are peer-led support clubs, and the whole point is to have a space where kids can become friends and allies. They're supposed to be outside of the scope of the School Act, Mr. Speaker, outside of the scope, independent, and safely away from the influence of anybody else other than the students that lead them. That was the point. That's who this is for. These groups give a child who is

questioning their sexuality or has friends who are or wants to talk about things a chance to be able to do that without the influence of anybody else. Isn't that the point?

They also allow other students to gain a better appreciation of problems facing peers. They talk about any number of things. Anybody who has attended a GSA, who has had the privilege of talking to these kids, knows that they talk about absolutely everything. I can't imagine if I had the ability to influence that the wrong way. If they invite me in, that's one thing. I'm there to listen, not to direct.

I mean, the fact that 40 per cent of our homeless are LGBTQ youth that are turned out by their parents: why would you give any opportunity to come in through an opposing place when they are able to do this on their own right now? I mean, I cannot understand. Again – I have to state this again, Mr. Speaker – if the government wants to change the School Act, then do that. Bring that legislation forward with integrity and research and background and stakeholder outreach and inclusive of everybody who's involved in that. Yes. Let's debate that. Happily. That's what we were asking for. The fact that there is a loophole now that could open that door to anybody – anybody – to be able to come and influence a student-led organization is completely wrong.

I would like to state for the record that most of this bill is extremely logical to me, and I felt I could support it. But I dug deeper, and I talked to so many people, and I felt it was necessary to amend the bill and strike this section that brings the potential for this instruction in. Unfortunately, that amendment was defeated. I can't understand why because it does nothing – that amendment has nothing to do with GSAs. Nothing. Section 50.1(1) has nothing to do with GSAs. Nothing. It's outside of the scope of GSAs, so take it out. Take it out, and I'll vote for it. Take it out. It has nothing to do with GSAs. Nothing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Minister of Infrastructure.

Mrs. Aheer: If the government wants to call us disgusting, go ahead. By all means, call us all disgusting. Say it for the record, though, and have the guts to say it loud and proud.

An Hon. Member: I have.

Mrs. Aheer: I know you have. Thank you for pointing that out. Believe me, Mr. Speaker, because – guess what? – that's what's been directed at me, and that's what's going to get directed at our children. Honestly, if this is how leadership is going to lead, what are they going to do on the back side? Not just that government, any government, and I include myself in that. [interjection]

The Speaker: Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, if the word "disgusting" is allowed to be used in this, then let me use it. It's absolutely disgusting that the government would not look at this part of the bill separately, bring it in front of people, bring it forward, debate it legitimately in this Legislature so we can all have an opinion. Instead it's hidden in smoke and mirrors. You wear that. You wear that. [interjections]

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order?

Point of Order
Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Mason: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hate to interrupt the hon. member in full dudgeon, but the remarks ought to be directed

through the chair, and pointing and saying, “You, you” in the speech is clearly out of order. You know, perhaps the hon. member might remember that.

The Speaker: Thank you. I’m sure she will.

Mrs. Aheer: I will. Thank you for pointing that out.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Aheer: The interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is that there’s a double standard here. Just so you know, abstaining from a vote is a legitimate vote. I will be abstaining from this vote because I agree with 90 per cent, well, even probably 80 per cent of this bill. Abstaining is done only by leaving the room. If I could, if there was a change made where I could sit with my body physically in this House and abstain, I would. Unless that change is made by this afternoon or before this vote is done, there is no chance for me to be able to do that. But I will not vote against this bill. I will not vote against this bill, and there’s nothing that the government can say to me that has not already been said that hasn’t made me understand the consequences of what I’m saying right now. The difference is that I’m willing to say it here.

The government has argued, Mr. Speaker: GSAs are not instructional, so there is no need for it to be part of 50.1(1), (2), (3), or (4). Remove that section, and you’ve got me. The government is overstepping its authority with this change and has absolutely no right to interfere with a student-led organization, not this government, not any future governments, not any government that I should be a part of in the future. I would want no part of influencing a GSA ever. Let’s bring that section forward and debate it appropriately. That’s all I’m asking for.

You know, you can call all Conservative MLAs homophobic, Mr. Speaker. You can fearmonger that we’re the enemy, which is really not a logical answer to any of the questions that I’ve put forward.

Mr. Carson: You’re voting against LGBTQ rights every time.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Meadowlark, tone it down.

Mrs. Aheer: And if that’s what you want to see, you can.

Mr. Speaker, this is what I’m talking about. This is exactly what I’m talking about. Every single person that I talk to, including all of my friends that are LGBTQ2-plus youth, adults, everybody who is in my life, the people I love most in life from here in Canada all the way across the world, every single one of them that I explained this legislation to couldn’t understand why something that is already beautiful and protected would need to go through the situation of what this government is putting it through. There’s absolutely no logical reason to include 50.1(1), (2), (3), or (4). The only reason to be able to do it is to try and change and exempt and amend something within the School Act without actually bringing that act forward. It’s the only logical answer.

The comments that will come are that, you know, I’m voting against this bill because I’m being forced to. I’m not voting against the bill; I’m abstaining. I will physically not be here – I’m telling you that – because I don’t want to vote against the bill. It was never my intention. I’m saying that in front of my caucus. They’re all right here right now. We’ve had this discussion. You can suggest that I don’t have my own voice. Well, you don’t know me very well.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that this government can say that a vote against this bill makes us whatever it is that they’d like to present in the rest of the world, but the rest of the world doesn’t believe them. Do they think that they can change people’s opinion about

me or anybody in my caucus or these wonderful people, anybody in the House who has an outreach of people that they love, that all of us are impacted by in how we vote on this bill? Don’t you think that anybody on this side of the House has had people that have come to them and said, “Can you explain to me why you would vote against this bill?” and that they haven’t had to do that? Do you think that they’re just not aware that this vote could have an impact even on their own constituencies, the people that they love . . .

Connolly: Yeah. They’re sitting as independents now.

The Speaker: Calgary-Hawkwood, keep it down.

Mrs. Aheer: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is what we’re dealing with. I am bringing forward a legitimate question, asking about why 50.1(1), (2), (3), and (4) are in this legislation and why it can’t be pulled out and debated separately under the School Act, where it should be. That is a separate piece.

9:20

If the government keeps saying that this is not instructional, then why does it need to be exempted from instructional? Please. It’s a really simple question. Oh, I know. I know what it is. It’s to protect kids from me. That’s right. I forgot. It’s to protect kids from my caucus. Right. How silly of me. I didn’t realize that. Thank you for protecting me from myself. Boy, I’m absolutely blown away. And thank you for protecting all of the people that I love in the world from me because you suggest that my intentions could possibly be anything other than asking about section 50.1(4).

Honestly, by all means – and bully away. None of us are in this House because we’re afraid of bullying, but those kids outside are. For anybody in the government to assume that a teacher would purposefully go out of their way to do that is wrong. If the legislation needed to be strengthened for that, I’m a hundred per cent behind it. All the GSA teachers, instructors, and everybody that I spoke to, Mr. Speaker, thought that that was a good idea. It’s a great idea. I’m a hundred per cent behind it.

That has nothing to do with 50.1(1), (2), (3), and (4). Nothing. Completely separate. But if you want to strengthen the legislation to make sure that teachers understand their role within this, you have my vote, a hundred per cent. That was fairly much a consensus amongst the people that I talked to as well, that 50.1(1), (2), (3), and (4) have nothing to do with whether or not a teacher can notify a parent outside of the scope of – I mean, let’s separate GSAs and the regular scope. The government, thank goodness, was finally clear yesterday when one of the opposition members asked about parental involvement. These were my questions from the beginning, so thank you for clearing that up.

GSAs are completely separate from whether or not teachers have the authority to describe what’s going on in a child’s life, completely separate, so 50.1(1), (2), (3), and (4) do not apply. The legislation is clear that if a teacher needs to tell a parent something, for reasons of distress or anything else, it has nothing to do with the GSA, nor should it. I completely agree.

All I’m asking – and call me what you want. Nobody will believe this government if they want to throw accusations this way at me. By all means, go right ahead. In fact, I challenge you to try and find it. But my point and what I will continue to say is that if the government is willing to take out this section and debate it legitimately outside of the scope of this bill, especially because GSAs presently sit outside of the scope of this bill, I will stand here and vote in favour with you. I will.

An Hon. Member: No, you won’t.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, I will. [interjection] Thank you, Minister.

See, this is the thing, this is the funny thing about being in here: everybody on that side thinks they know better. They just told me what I'm going to do. Welcome to what that looks like. Obviously, I don't know my own mind, and I'm being directed by somebody else. That's hysterical. I could have just as easily been directed by the bullying coming from that side, which, I might add, was profound – I only shared a minuscule amount with you – massive amounts. I actually thought that one of those guys was going to show up in my bedroom and yell and scream at me. It was unbelievable. You know what? This face-to-face and this kind of discussion: I'm okay with that because you can tell me to my face what you think. I dare you.

One thing I'm going to say, Mr. Speaker, about the word "disgusting." You know what? There is an interesting thing that what you put out is what you get back. Well, people who say things like that better be looking at their own reflections. Quite frankly, I would assume that that sort of language is unparliamentary.

Thank you.

Cortes-Vargas: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is an absolute pleasure to stand today on Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, and it's a pleasure because this bill is about students. As much as we can go on as to the personal interpretations of what it takes to come to this place, this bill is about that. And it isn't about our own personal experiences. I can tell you that I'm self-identified and have talked many times about being part of the LGBTQ community, and it is not about me. It is about a community that I'm a part of.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I don't get to call myself an ally because I am part of this community, but I do want to talk about allyship because I think it's important to talk about the elements that make up allyship. I'm not going to argue who is or who isn't. I'm just going to say for the record that it's important to reflect on those things because an allyship is not an identity. It is a lifelong process of building relationships between trust, consistency, accountability with marginalized individuals or groups. Allyship is not self-identified. Our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with.

Now, I'm not going to continue this debate of whether she is or she isn't. I want to say that if the members that are in this House today have the very privilege of being here by being elected by over 40 million Albertans . . .

An Hon. Member: Four million.

Cortes-Vargas: Four million. Sorry. I grew Alberta.

We're here to represent them, and that's our greatest privilege, to come into this Legislature and have 87 votes to determine the laws that govern our society. The law that we're talking about today is a law that protects children.

Again and again the example is taken of subsection 50.1, which is section 9 of this bill. That one has been explained. The reason it exists, the reason it is necessary is because there have been interpretations saying, "Because in GSAs you talk about sexual identity and children choose to talk about that, that is a reason why you need to notify parents," essentially the reason that we're here. Understand that this circumstance has occurred and that these cases have happened, and the reality is that this bill supports the belief, the understanding that gay students, LGBTQ students should be determinant of how they come out and that that is a fundamental principle for the resiliency in our communities.

I've continuously rejected the notion that GSAs and refusing to force children out prevents the ability for parents to be involved, and I continue to reject that premise, presented mainly by the majority of the opposition. I think that it should be done, that it should be rejected, because it fundamentally undermines the importance of the conversations that we're having right now. Parents, in fact, are involved when their child is supported through the coping mechanisms that GSAs provide in that they are able to come out to them, able to acquire the language that is necessary to be able to come out to their parents and have that difficult conversation.

When those parents want to be involved in those areas, there are many examples. I've read them into the record; I've put it into a member's statement. There are many examples of how parents are involved in this process, and – let me repeat – GSAs do not preclude that, and this bill does not prevent that. It, in fact, enhances the clarity of the roles of the people involved within GSAs, which is the fact that the principal needs to acknowledge the request for a GSA and make sure that it comes forward, make sure that if people are saying – and understand this: we come to the process of LGBTQ protections from the fact that talking about it has been criminal at some points.

That is why it's such a charged conversation. That is why generations and generations of LGBTQ people before us have had a hard time discussing this, because it, in fact, has been and continues to be in parts of the world a criminal act to be someone that loves a person in a same-sex relationship. Let us not forget that, because it creates a society where it is very, very difficult.

So, no, I disagree that this is anything about you, that this has anything to do with anything other than the students that need to be a part of this conversation. I think that making sure that it's clear that parental notification is not mandatory for these GSAs, which is a concept that actually is promoted by parents for choice, a group that was introduced by the member that spoke previous to me – one of the fundamental things that they support is mandatory notification for parents. [interjections] I think we need to take responsibility for the moments that we are endorsing and supporting certain groups to come out and . . . [interjections]

9:30

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Strathcona-Sherwood Park has the floor.

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, I think that this is an important conversation, and we need to continue to have it.

I think the reality exists for LGBTQ students that they need a safe space. That reality exists because it is very difficult. I can speak to that from a personal lens. I can speak to that from the many hundreds and hundreds of stories that I have heard. I think the reality continues to exist that people don't understand that it's not just an antibullying club. We couldn't name it that because it doesn't completely encompass the elements of a GSA that are important to it.

The realities are – and I'll use female same-sex relationships as an example – that you will face crude questions about who you are, and people will ask for explanations of why you decide to exhibit your identity or not to hide it. Whether it comes to your – people continuously ask: "Well, how do you know? How do you know that you are that?" You're continuously asked to validate those elements.

A place like a GSA becomes somewhere that you can talk to other people that have gone through similar experiences and are able to come up with the language to reiterate to, frankly, a society that is still adjusting to this idea. I can say as a person from the LGBTQ

community that experiencing harassment on the basis of my sexual identity or gender identity is something that I have experienced within the past week, so I don't doubt that young students, vulnerable groups need to be supported in this process. It is a real, real existence.

I think that we have a privilege today, and the privilege is to come here and make a choice that there are other ways to – I frankly think it's disingenuous to say that the reason we're here is to vote and to say that we're going to abstain as a way of doing that, because there are other measures, too. The fact remains that Committee of the Whole is the main place where you address those things. It's decided by the majority of the House, but it also has an element in it that talks about voting on each part of the clauses. You can vote on each clause separately, Madam Speaker, and that opportunity was missed.

I still believe, though, Madam Speaker, that in the discussion of allyship – and it is determined by your accountability to that very community, and it is not self-assigned. I think that is important because that is part of how the community creates an identity, creates circumstances that are truly safe for them and expectations that they want their advocates to uphold. I think that that is a critical element in this process.

I believe that we must remember that we're here for the students, that it isn't about us as individuals, and that protecting those very students, protecting the students that are experiencing this harm, is incredibly important. The reason that we're here today discussing this very bill is because there have been circumstances where accountability was not put in place for GSAs to be formed, and that needs to change today.

I hope that every member of this Legislature will support this bill and will continue to support the progress that we have made in Alberta and not promote this concept of taking away rights from groups of vulnerable students. That's a very selfish way to propel your political movement. I think that it has to be articulated that it is based on that political gain, that that represents why their position is where they are.

I think that throughout my speeches – throughout my speeches – I have communicated how GSAs are supportive to students in coming out to their parents. I've also communicated how section 50.1 is an important section of this bill and, in fact, is a main element of making sure that parents' mandatory notification is not acceptable, because it forces gay students out of the closet.

I think, Madam Speaker, that there's a lot of rhetoric around all of this. I want to assure my constituents, Albertans that at the end of the day, what we need to focus on is making sure that we're putting a system in place that protects those students, that creates safe and welcoming, inclusive spaces that are student-led, that provides them with groups of people, of peers that can talk to the realities of their lives, and that that isn't limited by what the opposition tries to create as a narrative of a sex group that exists within GSAs. I mean, that's so harmful in so many ways.

I think of the history of the LGBTQ community and think of the many times that in regard to not giving us rights, we were compared to predators, we were compared to communists – actually, that was a comment on one of my member's statements – we were compared to any number of name-calling things, things that could have us thrown in jail. Why? Because people interpret my living my life not in the closet as a promotion of homosexual lifestyles. I think that's a very real concept that we need to discuss because the ability for me to exist without discrimination is just that, me existing without discrimination. It's not a promotion. It is me existing and every person in the LGBTQ community existing without being discriminated against, Madam Speaker.

I am proud that this government and that the members opposite and the independents have spoken to this because it is incredibly

important not to get lost in rhetoric that is actively engaging their political allies. I think that at the end of the day, if the politicians in this House lose sight of the fact that this must remain about the students, about our school system, about a society that is free of discrimination – we must look for ways to support this form of legislation now and continuing in the future. I think that it's absolutely imperative, Madam Speaker, that we all come together and we have conversations that are constructive and that, in fact, don't promote a concept that for many years has said that GSAs or the gathering of LGBTQ people are in some way something that should be hidden in the corner.

I think this is a time that we reject this very notion, that it should be censored, because that is the other element about this, that if we want to restrict what these students are talking about even if it's student-led, which, frankly, is, like, just a fleeting sense – I mean, they're meeting at lunchtime. They could meet at lunchtime anyways. They're going to talk about this because it's student-led. I believe, Madam Speaker, that if we don't put things like this in place, we cause harm whereas, I believe, if we put something like this, we don't.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe that the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park had a few more things to say, so I'd ask her if she'd like to continue saying a couple of words.

9:40

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, one of the last things I want to say is the fact that I do believe that when we don't create safe spaces, we also create a sense that those children that need those support groups will look to alternative spaces for belonging. I think that that's what we should evaluate.

The reality is that we live in a society filled with social media, with Internet, that no amount of filters, blocking can really censor and that transgender youth especially are at risk of getting involved in sex trade industries. I think we need to talk about the reality of what happens when we continue to marginalize these very students because that is the foundation of where they continue after that. They look for a place of belonging, and they look – and you see the numbers – to drug use and alcohol use in order to cope with the realities that they're facing. If we don't allow for a space like this to exist without forcing them to be outed, then the reality is that we are causing harm. We are causing harm.

And the folks that are still, you know, on the fence on whether these GSAs should exist or not have used again – and I need to repeat this multiple times: have used – this section on the fact that GSAs talk about sexual identity and gender expression to demand parental notification beforehand. This part of this bill needs to be here, and there's absolutely no way I would ever have supported that section being removed from this bill.

Madam Speaker, I am proud of the discussions we've had, the conversations that we continue to have, and the progress that we make for every Albertan, because it is every Albertan. GSAs provide a really caring space for everyone in that school. Whether one member attends that GSA or not, you see a decrease in substance dependence in that school. Why? Because there's a sense of acceptance and belonging regardless of who you are and where you come from. I think that's important to recognize.

Madam Speaker, I truly appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 24 and to continue to debate this bill and to support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As you know, the United Conservative Party's leader, the Hon. Jason Kenney, does not hold a seat in the House, and while we hope that the Premier will call a by-election soon so that he can join us, he's not able to speak on the record.

As such, I'd like to briefly read into the record some of the key elements of the United Conservative Party's leader's remarks on this bill from last week. Madam Speaker:

We strongly support efforts to make schools free from bullying, and to provide peer support, counselling, and safe [places and] spaces for kids who might be subject to bullying.

We believe that is especially true for students who are subject to bullying or prejudice because of their sexual identity.

We support Gay Straight Alliances, which became law with the unanimous support of MLAs from both of our legacy parties. We believe that these, and other anti-bullying peer groups, can be a useful way of supporting students going through difficult times.

We do not support, I repeat we do not support mandatory notification of parents regarding the involvement of students in GSAs.

And neither I nor anyone in our caucus has proposed "outing" gay kids. To suggest otherwise is offensive and dishonest. It is the opposite of what [we] have actually said.

We believe that the vast majority of parents have unconditional love for their kids, and we acknowledge the research underscoring that parental [involvement and parental] support . . . is one of the most important factors in supporting youth at risk, including sexual minority youth. This research has been recognized by some of the strongest GSA advocates themselves.

We also support the longstanding principles – enshrined in law – that parents are the primary educators of [their] children, and that schools operate under legal authority delegated by parents.

We affirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' recognition that "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children," and [we support] the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' defence of "the liberty of parents . . . to ensure the moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions," rights which were recently affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada.

We believe that every child is unique, and that every circumstance faced by kids at risk is different.

We believe that highly trained educators are in a much better position than politicians to exercise their discretion on whether it is in the best interests of a child to engage parents . . .

Teachers, not politicians, should decide when it makes sense to engage parents.

The unique circumstances of [every] child should be the key factor, not the blunt instrument of law.

This is especially true given that Bill 24 applies to five year olds in kindergarten, treating them the same way as it treats seventeen year olds in grade twelve.

That makes no sense.

Bill 24 would make it illegal to engage parents about certain school activities for children beginning in kindergarten, regardless of their individual circumstances.

What about children with developmental disabilities, or those who have suffered abuse or trauma, or have mental or emotional health challenges? Schools are to be legally barred from engaging parents, even if teachers, counsellors or principals deem it prudent to do so.

We are also concerned that the Bill undermines the longstanding legal obligation of schools to inform parents, and I quote here from Section 50 of the School Act:

"where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality." (Section 50.1(1) of the School Act)

Bill 24 says this will no longer be the case with respect to educational activities associated with GSAs.

According to the Alberta Teachers' Association Guide on GSAs, GSAs are not merely peer support groups, but also include "curriculum," "schoolwide educational activities," "political activities," etc.

In other words, the NDP is trying to do indirectly what it cannot do directly: that is teaching sensitive subjects that would normally require parental notification. Parents would be barred from knowing anything about the guest speakers, programs, or content being taught, a clear violation of the spirit of the School Act.

Bill 24 also concentrates enormous new powers in the hands of the Minister, undermining local decision making by principals, school boards, and independent schools. By doing the latter, the government is very likely setting itself up for costly Charter litigation by violating the 2015 decision of this Supreme Court of Canada in the Loyola High School case.

These powers are without precedent anywhere in Canada. Not even Ontario's Liberal government, which has taken a very aggressive approach to these issues, has proposed anything like the powers in Bill 24.

The NDP has never proposed powers like this before.

They did not do so prior to the adoption of Bill 10.

They did not propose these powers as amendments to Bill 10.

They did not raise any of this in their election platform.

And they have governed for the past two and a half years without concern about teachers being able to engage parents when appropriate.

The only rationale they have offered is transparently cynical: as a political instrument to attack their partisan opponents, part of their desperate effort to talk about anything but their failed economic record. We aren't going to let them get away with that.

So to recap:

- The United Conservative Caucus supports Gay Straight Alliances and other peer support groups to help provide safe environments for youth at risk, including sexual minority youth.
- We support Bill 10.
- We oppose mandatory notification of parents of membership in GSAs.
- We absolutely oppose the notion of schools outing gay students.
- We believe every child is unique, and that educators should be left with the discretion they currently have to engage parents when it is in the best interests of the child to do so.
- We believe that parents should continue to have the right to be informed of educational programs or materials that deal with human sexuality.
- We believe that it is wrong to treat young elementary school children the same . . . as teenagers in high school on sensitive matters.
- [And] we believe in local decision making by principals and school boards, rather than constantly amassing new powers in the hands of one politician.

So, in other words, we support neither extreme of mandatory notification nor of a legal prohibition to parental engagement. We support the common-sense status quo, the same status quo the NDP has supported until this [past] week [or so].

9:50

Madam Speaker, these are the words of the United Conservative leader, Jason Kenney.

I would like to thank you for this time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just have some quotations that I'd like to read into the record. This one is from March 29, 2017, from Global News. The title is Jason Kenney Slammed for Comments about Gay-straight Alliances. Mr. Kenney said:

"I have said that I would not repeal Bill 10, if that's what you're asking me. And I do, however, think that parents have a right to know what's going on with their kids in the schools unless the parents are abusive.

I think generally speaking, parents have a right to know what their kids are doing in school," Kenney continued. "If there's evidence that the parents are abusive, then they shouldn't be involved."

That sounds like outing kids. I don't know about you guys.

From September 28, 2017, the *Edmonton Journal*: Education Minister Vows to Tighten Privacy Rules around Gay-straight Alliances in Schools. The quote from the article is: "Kenney has said it should be up to school staff to decide whether to tell a child's parents or guardians whether they're in a gay-straight alliance." That again sounds like outing students. I don't know if the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon had talked to his leader before he made those statements.

Again, from the Red Deer newspaper. What's the Red Deer newspaper?

An Hon. Member: *Red Deer Advocate*.

Connolly: *Red Deer Advocate*.

Province to Introduce Law Preventing GSA Students from Being Outed. The quote from the article is: "Kenney says in some cases it's best to tell parents their kids have joined a gay-straight alliance and that school officials are in the best position to make [that] decision." That also sounds like outing gay students. I don't know if that's wrong or if the paper is wrong or if they misquoted or what, but I'm pretty sure the paper wasn't wrong.

Again, from a CBC News article on September 28, 2017: Alberta to Outlaw Outing of GSA students, Education Minister Says. That article states that "Kenney said the NDP government was too aggressive in making religious schools follow the law, which compels all students to allow gay-straight alliances if students ask for them."

I would like to ask the member why he thinks that religious schools shouldn't follow the law, why he thinks that Jason Kenney believes that he should out gay kids, if he believes that these quotes are true, and whether or not he agrees with his leader, Jason Kenney.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise in support of Bill 24. I've been thinking a lot about this bill. This bill will have a direct impact on people's lives. GSAs and QSAs save lives, period, and every student deserves a school that is welcoming, caring, and a safe place to learn. For those who are listening and

maybe are not familiar with the bill, I'll just give a really quick Coles Notes version of what the bill is.

This piece of legislation will strengthen supports for students wishing to create or join a gay-straight alliance or queer-straight alliance at their schools by requiring publicly funded schools to create and publicly disclose their policies in regard to GSAs, protecting the privacy of students who choose to join a GSA or QSA and preventing their identity from being outed, ensuring that principals have a responsibility to help students create a GSA or QSA in a timely manner, and providing clarity about roles and responsibilities among school authorities for the establishment of welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments.

I was interested to hear my colleagues speak about the context for this bill and why this piece of legislation is so necessary. I would like to talk a little bit about my high school experience and then talk about other people's experiences that I've met because I think it's important to have their voices heard in this Chamber. I went to a Catholic school, not necessarily because I'm a religious person but because they had an excellent theatre arts IB program. I knew many people in that program who were LGBTQ2S, people that I am still friends with today. I only knew they were LGBTQ because they told me. But I remember them saying to me to not tell anyone because our school wasn't exactly LGBTQ friendly.

The only mention of sexuality was a brief conversation in our CALM class about how abstinence is the only true form of birth control, with no mention of sexual orientation or gender identity nor consent. I also don't ever remember seeing advertisements for a GSA or QSA in my school, and, to be honest, I doubt there was one. So my friends didn't have a safe space to go to to talk to other LGBTQ-plus students or their straight allies. They just had our small circle of friends to confide in.

I remember one of those friends that came out. He came out to our peer group and asked if he should tell his parents. My response to him was to only do so if you feel comfortable and safe. So he decided to do it but was kicked out of his house shortly after. He became homeless just because he wanted to be himself and not stay in the closet. A friend of mine took him in for a few months, and finally his family took him back. But I remember how hard that was for him.

This, unfortunately, is not uncommon. According to the LGBTQ2S Youth Housing and Shelter Guidelines from the Ministry of Community and Social Services

- Nearly one in three homeless youth in Canada identify as LGBTQ2S.
- LGBTQ2S youth identify the primary reason for homelessness as family rejection due to gender identity or sexual orientation.
- LGBTQ2S homeless youth face higher rates of discrimination, violence and abuse in the shelter system than their non-LGBTQ2S counterparts.
- LGBTQ2S youth are at higher risk of mental health concerns and self-harm and exhibit higher rates of [suicide] than the general [public].

I can only imagine, if that friend decided to join a GSA and then became outed by his parents when he wasn't ready, the anxiety that he would have felt, the fear of abuse, the fear of rejection. It could have been a lot worse for him.

Last Sunday I attended a GSA rally in Calgary, and I would like to say that not a single member from the UCP was there – not a single one – and that's shameful. I saw some familiar faces and some new faces. I ran into a dear friend of mine, Amelia Newbert. She wanted to share her story with you all today and wanted to share what Bill 24 meant to her. She also mentioned that she had barely told anyone these details, but she felt compelled to show how important this bill is.

10:00

I'm going to quote her here.

From the age of 5, I've always known I was transgender. However, it wasn't until my 30th birthday I started living as who I was. This was in large part due to repeated, ongoing physical abuse I suffered as a child every time I tried to express my gender identity. It left me feeling worthless, less than human, and most of all alone. As a result [I] attempted to take my life numerous times. All I ever wanted or needed was to know I wasn't alone. That someone understood.

This is what GSAs [and QSAs] are providing. They aren't pushing an agenda, they aren't violating rights. They are ensuring that our children don't have to suffer through what I've gone through. They are creating support and connection. They are saving lives.

This is also why under no circumstance can children be outed to anyone for attending GSA[s], it literally isn't safe. Period.

And I can tell you that, heartbreakingly, stories like mine aren't a thing of the past. I hear them over and over again from youth I work with.

It is not [a] complicated matter. Kids are dying without access to the safe spaces GSAs create and we need to do everything possible to ensure they have them.

I don't understand the debate or posturing or amendments, Bill 24 is essential. We owe it to our kids. They deserve better than this.

Another person I met at the rally was Leigh. They wanted to tell their story and express the importance of GSAs and how Bill 24 is essential. These are their words.

I hate using public bathrooms. They are just so uncomfortable to me because I don't feel right in them. I don't use the men's room because I'm not a man, and I don't use the women's room because I'm not a woman. I use the men's room purely because that's what I look like.

Whenever I go to see a doctor, I'm always referred to by my old name. Even if the nurse puts a note on my chart, most doctors ignore it. At work, they can't change my name in their computer, but everyone knows me as Leigh. Last time I went to an office to get information, I told them my name was Leigh and they got confused because my legal name was different. And I'm used to showing multiple IDs to get my mail.

This is the difficulty I face as an adult. There is something so exhausting and discouraging about having to say again and again that my name is Leigh, and I want they and them pronouns to be used. I'm tired of explaining why my name is different on my ID. I'm tired of being referred to by he by people that know I prefer [otherwise]. And I'm an adult. I am comfortable with my gender. I've already gone through my discovery phase.

Now imagine this. You're in grade nine. You're beginning to feel a little [bit] weird. Puberty is starting, and all your classmates are talking about crushes and stuff. The conversation turns to you. They ask you which girl you have a crush on. The truth is, you don't. You don't feel the same way that your friends are describing. You don't know what to call it because you have only been taught about human reproduction in sex ed. You have no idea what's going on. You think that you are weird. Or broken. Or gay. Not gay as in a boy who likes a boy, or a girl who likes a girl. Gay as in weird, broken, stupid, wrong. Alone at night in your room, you turn to Google. There you find half-truths and no reliable resources. So you struggle. You feel alone. You feel like no one understands you. And you feel wrong.

That's the kid that never got a GSA. That's the kid that never felt comfortable going to a teacher or parent or anyone to talk to. That's the kid who could turn to self-harm, substance abuse, and could end their life.

[The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood] stood in front of the legislature and said that GSAs save lives. That kid that felt alone,

and clueless, and hurt needed that GSA. They needed some sort of support and education to understand that not being what everyone else was, was not wrong.

GSAs absolutely save lives. I know this first hand. With the help of a teacher, I founded the Pride Club at WG Murdoch School in Crossfield Alberta. I had a solid group of kids that regularly came, and we made a name for ourselves when we organized Spirit Day in our school.

I found myself the main person to talk to about Pride Club. One night, near midnight I got a message from someone. They told me that they thought they were trans and asked me for help. They were so afraid of their parents finding out, and they only felt comfortable with who they were in the Pride Club space. She could be herself and really explore who she was.

We laughed in our meetings because we were sharing memes, and funny videos. We ate pizza and shared snacks and made jokes. We got serious and talked about what we struggled with. And we became a close family. I could look at one in the hallways of the school and see the light in their eyes when they saw me. I could watch them become so much more comfortable with themselves, and with their friends and classmates.

GSAs not only save lives, they enhance them. They take a kid that is struggling to find themselves and gives them a place to be who they want with people that get them.

Bill 24 does not give schools or the state any power to indoctrinate young queer kids in GSAs. Bill 24 does not create small political cells in schools that are protected. Bill 24 does not make GSAs a tool of an authoritative state that Mr. Kenney seems to be so scared of.

Every GSA in this province is run completely by students, for students. Teachers do support, mainly as an adult mentor figure that the kids can trust implicitly. Bill 24 protects the privacy of those kids. Bill 24 makes sure that the students can keep this space safe for themselves. And Bill 24 makes sure that the prying eyes of potentially abusive parents stay away from at-risk kids.

Bill 24 solidifies the existence of GSAs in schools, saves kids lives, and helps them become the best version of themselves possible. Bill 24 makes sure that GSAs can exist without opposition so that kid I described earlier can be comfortable and safe. Bill 24 is so important because that kid was me. First having a group of like minded people helped. And then getting exposed to the wider community I didn't know was out there created who I am today.

Bill 24 guarantees this for kids in the future. They need to know that the government has their back. And they need to know that people like us are out here willing to fight tooth and nail for this.

Madam Speaker, it is so important that this bill is passed, and I encourage all members to support it. Looking across the way with the UCP, I know that every MLA sitting over there has LGBTQ2S people in their ridings. In fact, the person I was just describing lives in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and I hope that he votes for this bill. I hope that he stands in this Chamber on behalf of Leigh and says yes to Bill 24.

We speak about the importance of consultations in this Chamber. I'd like to know if they consulted with the LGBTQ2S community in their constituencies, because they are not supporting a bill that literally saves lives, a bill that is meant to make a community feel safe and supported by their schools. It is truly a shame that they won't listen to them.

Good news, though. Here is their chance to be on the right side of history. They still have a chance to vote for this bill, and I strongly encourage them to vote for it and stand with the LGBTQ2S community and not against it.

To conclude, I will be supporting Bill 24. I really hope that the opposition listened to what I had to say, listened to Leigh's story, listened to Amelia's story.

Thank you.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This morning I rise to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. Members from all sides of the House have spoken to this bill with both passion and concern for Alberta, our schools, our parents, and our youth. I've listened to all sides of the House and have reviewed the bill carefully. I have also had the opportunity to consult with constituents, staff, and members opposite and have paid close attention to amendments proposed by opposition members.

Ultimately, little has changed for the Alberta Party with respect to Bill 24. Since the very beginning the Member for Calgary-Elbow and I have supported this legislation because it's progressive, necessary, and it can save lives. Madam Speaker, I'm proud to rise in the House today to support this bill on behalf of the Alberta Party caucus, and I implore my colleagues down the aisle to do the same.

Bill 24 has generated impassioned debate that has been at times eye-opening and at times humbling. On other occasions it's been downright sad. While the Alberta Party, the Liberals, and the NDP recognize that this bill is about the safety of kids and teens, the UCP's position centres on the preference and desires of parents as if they are the ones who have to show up at school as gay teenagers and deal with mockery and belittling from their peers. This has been a consistent hole in the UCP's case. Madam Speaker, why does the life of a gay kid matter less than the beliefs of a homophobic parent?

The research on GSAs and QSAs is vast and growing. Overwhelmingly, it points to the success of these organizations, their ability to provide kids and teens with a safe space in which they can share, learn, and grow without the disapproving eye of homophobic or transphobic classmates, certain religious groups, and/or society at large.

Dr. Kristopher Wells and Dr. André Grace, professors at the University of Alberta, have long been the go-to scholars on the issue of gay-straight alliances. While their research is invaluable, other scholars take a different yet equally affirming approach to this issue.

In her article published in the *Journal of Homosexuality* in 2014 Meredith G.F. Worthen argues that GSAs aren't just beneficial for LGBTQ students but transformative for other students who merely attended a school where one was present. Students need not even join the GSA at their school in order to display higher rates of acceptance of LGBTQ people once they reach postsecondary, a fact that speaks directly to the ability of GSAs to educate, enlighten, and transform.

Madam Speaker, to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill 24 is a proud moment for me, and it is one that I'm sure many Albertans cherish inside and outside the LGBTQ community. In fact, it's rare that we stand up for LGBTQ people in Alberta. Historically the provincial government has actually stood in the way of progress. In 1991, when Delwin Vriend was fired from King's college in Edmonton for being gay, the Alberta Human Rights Commission refused to recognize sexual orientation as protected grounds for discrimination. Vriend took the government to court, and after he won, the provincial government appealed. Vriend took his case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and ultimately won in a landmark case known as Vriend versus Alberta, or simply the Vriend decision.

While we salute courageous figures like Delwin Vriend in the House today, we must also acknowledge the rarity of passing

legislation in support of LGBTQ people. In years past we have left them to fight for themselves in the courtroom, afraid to offend social conservatives who would sooner see gay people back in the closet. No more, Madam Speaker. No more will Alberta put human rights on the back burner, and no more will we allow pernicious stereotypes about the social values of Albertans to perpetuate.

The last time I rose to speak about Bill 24, I spoke about kindness, and just to reiterate, this is ultimately what Bill 24 is about. However, it's about something else, too: progress, not just progress for queer people but for their friends, families, allies, and classmates. When a GSA is present in a school, Madam Speaker, compassion, love, and kindness win, and without these things we cannot progress. GSAs and the autonomy and confidentiality they provide are a huge step forward for Alberta youth and the cornerstone of a happy and healthy school. It's time we acknowledge GSAs for what they are, crucial networks of support that deserve respect, autonomy, and the ability to blossom.

Back to the issue of parents. They've come up a lot during these debates, and rightfully so. They are the people that love and care for our students in ways that we cannot describe. However, Madam Speaker, I do not agree with the narrative of parenthood that the UCP caucus has constructed for us. In their view, parents are omniscient and universally kind figures who are being denied access to their kids' lives and information because of GSAs.

As we approach voting on this legislation, I ask that we not think of the homophobic parents who disagree with GSAs and their message but the parents of gay kids and teens who sleep a little bit better knowing that their kids go to school with a safe space that respects their lives, their sexualities, and their privacy. Let us not get hung up on the parents who would see GSAs crumble. Let us instead celebrate the parents who support their kids no matter who or what they are and the parents who want a safe space for their kids.

Most of all, Madam Speaker, this legislation calls on us to celebrate children, kids, and their interests. It calls on us to recognize them as needing decency, privacy, and respect and as being diverse beings who just want to be safe. That's why I'm supporting this bill and why I believe my colleagues should as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. member under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will recognize Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been disappointed by the tone of debate on this bill. I'm proud to be a member of Alberta's gay and lesbian community. I know that some members across, very soon after we were elected, joined me in Canada's only gay rodeo hosted right in Strathmore. That was a great time. Unfortunately, that event is no longer with us as it ran into some financial troubles, but we've been doing what we can to try and restart it. I know that they're working with the Calgary Stampede. But there is more to being an ally than showing up at a fun rodeo.

I vote based on reasoned analysis of this bill, not its name. The name of the bill would certainly make it easy to vote for it, but we have to vote on its contents, not its name. Bill 24 is an attempt, I believe, to use the desire of most Albertans to protect vulnerable youth in order to divide Albertans for partisan gain. This issue is far more complicated and sensitive than the usual partisan banter between parties.

We can normally have some pretty strong words in this House and differences on tax policy and spending and any number of issues. The divide between our parties is very great on those issues,

but on this topic I actually don't think the differences are all that great. They're rhetorical differences in so many cases. They are partisan differences. But the actual substance of these differences is relatively small. That difference has been exacerbated by the political tone in the province. That tone is something I think that all of us in this Chamber carry at least some responsibility for, myself included.

Gay and lesbian youth are at significantly higher risk than their peers for suicide, substance abuse, and homelessness. Being a teenager is tough enough already, so I can only begin to imagine how much more difficult it would be for kids who feel that out of place. This is compounded if they don't have loving and caring friends, family, and communities.

I think back to my experience in high school. I grew up in mostly small army and air force towns across the country, but I went to at least three years of high school in Trenton, an air force base. We had, as far as I know, only one kid, one of my peers, out as gay. It was not easy for him. There were certainly more than just him who were not out: some who were thought to be, some who probably would have surprised us, but only one kid who felt he could come out. Frankly, I don't know how the heck he did it because he was not treated well. He had some friends, but the majority of his peers, while maybe not hateful, were at least snickering and unsupportive.

10:20

I think times have changed. If I think back to, you know, just 10 years ago, I think that all of our views on these issues have changed in one direction, some more than others, but I think the vast majority of people's views – Canadian views, Albertan's views, and people in this House – have changed over the last 10 and 20 years on these issues. I like to think that if that kid who I went to high school with was around today, he would have a very different experience than he did when I was in high school, but I imagine that it would still be greatly difficult in any circumstance.

Bill 10 was passed, I think, in 2014, and since then there has been some debate if parents should be notified if their children join a GSA. Bill 24 will make it illegal in virtually all circumstances for teachers to notify their parents if their child is involved in a GSA, and the ostensible reasoning behind this is that any parental notification would out a gay or lesbian kid before they're ready and put them at risk. If I believed for one minute that that was the case, I would vote for Bill 24, but I don't believe it is.

I know the NDP sent out a press release last week. I keep a ticker in my office about how many days I can go without being mentioned in NDP news releases, and that number gets pretty small. They mentioned in a news release that at the Wildrose Party convention in 2016 I spoke against a resolution that would have made notification to parents for GSAs mandatory. Someone had put forward at the policy convention a resolution there that would have made it mandatory that if their kid joins a GSA or is involved in anything involving sexuality, period, the parents would be notified. I was proud to speak against that at the last Wildrose convention that we held, and members voted between 95 and 98 per cent against it, decisively opposing it.

What I said there was that a blanket law requiring parental notification, which would out some gay and lesbian kids before they're ready, was foolhardy. But just as equally, I believe that a blanket law banning parental notification in any case whatsoever is also foolhardy. I've been on the record speaking against mandatory parental notification because that would out gay and lesbian kids before they're ready, and that is wrong.

The overwhelming majority of parents love their children unconditionally and care more about their children than any government, bureaucrat, or politician possibly could. This is not to

say that some parents would not be loving or accepting and supportive of their children coming out. In some circumstances that could even put youth at risk, and that is where the government has a legitimate role to play in intervening to protect children, but government should not create a blanket law entirely forbidding any and all notification. A blanket ban on notifying parents is as irresponsible as automatically notifying parents regardless of the circumstances. Teachers and other education professionals are better suited to make such a sensitive decision on the ground, not politicians, myself included.

Bill 24 makes no distinction whatsoever between a five-year-old and a 17-year-old. Blanket laws like this, that are meant to achieve political objectives, are overly blunt and do not account for nuance.

Bill 24 also overrides the principle that schools have authority delegated to them by parents, not by government. We should remember that parents, not the government, are the primary authority over children. The government should only ever intervene in that special relationship when there is abuse or neglect, not differences over politics. This is a legislated wedge being driven between parents and their children, not intended to protect those children but to change the political channel, and this is doing so using the most vulnerable youth in our society.

I've spoken with my constituents, I've spoken with parents, I've spoken with kids, and I've spoken with members of our gay and lesbian community. The vast – vast – majority of them want us to act to protect sexual minority youth, but this is a blunt instrument, and it is overreach.

Most members of this House know where I stand on issues of personal liberty involving sexual matters. I don't believe that it is any business of the government what consenting adults do in private, but matters involving our children, especially young children, are more complicated. When we as legislators are making laws concerning the most vulnerable children in our society, sexual minority youth, we should take care to put them first and remember that in the vast majority of cases their greatest ally is mom and dad.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: I just have a really brief question, Madam Speaker. The lead point made by the member opposite started off by saying that he's part of the gay and lesbian community, I think, was the quote. I just want him to clarify what that means.

The Deputy Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks, did you wish to respond?

Any other questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have to say that I'm so proud to stand here today in support of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. I'm going to be as brief as I can today because I think that throughout this debate we've heard many incredibly moving speeches that have been made from some of the members on this side as well as some of our independent members.

I mean, when we look at the people on this side, people who actually understand this bill and the effect that it will have on our school system, I think it's important to listen to their thoughts. I think it's important for me to stand and show my support for this piece of legislation for the many people in my life who have helped me understand why it is so important to protect these rights, the rights of my friends and the larger community, for the people who

go through every single day of their life being attacked for how they identify or for who they love.

This bill, of course, will require publicly funded schools to disclose their policies in regard to GSAs and QSAs. It will ensure that principals have a responsibility to help create these in places where they have not already been established, and it will clarify some of the roles among school authorities for establishing a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment. But, most importantly, as has come up several times throughout this debate, it will ensure that the privacy of a student that chooses to join a GSA or QSA will be protected.

Madam Speaker, every single student in this province deserves a welcoming, caring, and safe place to learn and a place where they are respected. We need to understand the value of protecting GSAs in our schools.

The choice of a student to not disclose to their family that they identify as LGBTQ does not necessarily have any reflection on the quality of a parent or guardian. I was a student not that long ago, surprising or not, and I have the most incredibly accepting parents. I am so blessed with the respect that they have given me, but that does not mean that I told them everything. I identify as a straight, cis male and never had to struggle with the incredibly complex decision to come out to the wider community, but if I did have that, I can imagine that it would have taken me quite a long time before I was willing to tell my parents, even with the acceptance and the love that they showed me. It's a deeply personal matter, and no one has the right to decide when a student should come out besides the student themselves.

From the discussions that I've had with teachers and from the articles that I've seen coming from the teaching community, they do not want the responsibility to have to inform a parent when their child joins a GSA, so I am not sure why the Conservative opposition continues down this line of messaging. I really don't understand it. Once again, it is the child's decision, not a teacher's decision.

I want to share a story with you that was shared with me by a close friend in response to this legislation. When they were in school, they were coming to the realization that they identified as part of the LGBTQ community and went to a teacher. The teacher had no understanding of this issue and asked if the student was gay. Worried that the teacher might out this student, they told the teacher no and continued to have to hide their own identity.

10:30

Without a support group at that time this friend of mine was bullied, harassed, and even assaulted in the washrooms. They were told at home that it was wrong to be gay. They were told at school that it was wrong to be gay. Hence, they believed that they themselves were wrong to identify how they did. Imagine the impact that that has on a child. This scenario is obviously not the only way this conversation can play out, but it often has played out that way, and it's damaging to our community.

Of course, we've heard the numbers around how our LGBTQ community can so easily end up and do end up marginalized, numbers like: 40 per cent of those who find themselves homeless identifying as LGBTQ; 33 per cent of LGBTQ youth have attempted suicide in comparison to 7 per cent of youth in general; 49 per cent of trans students, 33 per cent of lesbian students, and 40 per cent of gay students may have experienced sexual harassment in school in the last year. I wonder how the opposition can stand in this House with all of the facts in front them and still vote against the rights of our students. At what age do our human rights start to be recognized? Once they're voting age? I really don't understand. When they can vote for them?

Madam Speaker, the opposition say that they are allies, yet their newly elected leader in his long history of politics has never supported the LGBTQ community, not even once, as far as I know, over the many, many human rights bills that he has had to make decisions over. I really think that that says something. Whether the opposition would like to admit it or not, that is their leader. We just heard a member of the opposition read into the record that Kenney has concerns about a child with a disability considering joining a GSA, that their parent should be notified because, God forbid, a child with a disability joins a GSA. It's truly shameful. I cannot even fathom how that member was willing to read that on behalf of their new leader. It's just shameful.

I just have to say that, well, over the last week or so of this debate I have never been more disappointed in this opposition party, yet I have never been more proud of this government side of the Legislature as well as some of our independents, I think most of them, who have stood up, showing their support. And I have never been more proud of the people in our communities who identify as or are allies to the LGBTQ community, who continue to fight for their own rights to be respected.

There is still so much more that we need to do to support this community, Madam Speaker, to ensure that they are heard, respected, and protected, but I am happy that through Bill 24 we will take one more step towards that goal. I do thank the Minister of Education for bringing it forward. I have seen the positive impact that GSAs can make in our schools.

One of the first things that I had the opportunity to do after being elected was join our Minister of Education and the Premier of Alberta at my high school, Jasper Place high school, which I not only attended but now represent. It was an incredible day for me and all of those high school students. Today we take another step in protecting their inalienable rights as human beings to love who they want, identify as what they want, or be an ally to who they want without being outed.

I just want to wrap up by saying that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks said that over the last 10 years a lot of people's views on this issue have changed. I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but my belief in the equal rights of all people has never changed. I'd ask all of you – if you came to the conclusion that being a member of the LGBTQ community is wrong at one point or another throughout your life because of something that you were taught, I think you should take a second look at what you're learning from.

Madam Speaker, there is still a lot for me to learn about supporting those in the LGBTQ community, but it starts with listening to those in the community. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will recognize Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This debate should be really simple. In 2017 it is okay to be gay. In 2017 it is okay to be an ally, it's okay to be in a GSA, and it is never, ever, ever okay to out gay kids without their consent. That's pretty straightforward. That's what this bill is about, and the opposition we see to that shows that the UCP is on the wrong side of history. They are trying to somehow play both sides by on one hand saying: well, we support GSAs, but – nudge, nudge, whisper, whisper – actually, we're with you if you're homophobic, if you somehow question the legitimacy of LGBTQ peoples to simply be who they are. That's what this is. There's really no more to it than that.

In 2017 in Alberta there should absolutely be no question that it should be up to students and students alone to disclose to whom they wish, when they wish their own sexual identity. Period. Any

discussion or debate about whether this undermines the rights of parents completely misses the mark. This bill allows for teachers to disclose in the rare but serious cases where a student may display a risk of self-harm or harm to others. That accounts for any concerns that may exist over the best interests of the children who are in our school system.

Now, the vast, vast, vast majority of parents in our province and our country care deeply about their children. They want nothing but the best for their kids. They can have open and honest conversations with their children about who those children are, who they think they are, who they're becoming. As a parent of a teenager I can tell you that these are trying and challenging times. We've all gone through that. We know how difficult that is, discovering who you are. But I can also tell you that as a parent of a teenager that your teens don't always necessarily want to talk to you. They want to talk to their friends. They want to explore those challenging questions and discussions with one another, and they want to do that in a safe and supportive environment. That's what a GSA is.

What this bill does is protects those kids, the small but still substantial number of kids whose parents would do them harm, whose parents would kick them out of the house, whose parents would abuse those children. The UCP and no one else can tell me who those parents are. We don't know. That risk is real. Upwards of 40 per cent of homeless youth are LGBTQ. That's all we need to know to tell us that there is a risk to these kids. This bill does nothing more than protect the simple fundamental human right for these kids to be who they are.

It's not about whether or not we have GSAs. I take the UCP at their word that they don't mind there being GSAs. That's fair. That would be a truly remarkable statement if they didn't like that. But they're somehow trying to equivocate, somehow trying to find some middle ground that just doesn't exist, nor should it. This bill is only about who discloses to whom and when. It puts control in the hands of students, where it absolutely should be.

So I am calling out the UCP on their rather interesting and I think disingenuous strategy of conflating and confusing people using technical sections of a bill that really have nothing to do with whether or not the bill is acceptable. It's just simply the way the bill is written for all the correct technical reasons that enables students to have control over their own lives. That's all this bill is about. It's no more complicated than that, so to evoke section 50.1 and try to confuse, as if this is some sort of nefarious plot by the dastardly NDP to undermine the family unit – that's not what this is. That's absolutely not what this is, and it is disingenuous to suggest otherwise.

In the end, without hesitation, the Alberta Party and the Alberta Party caucus enthusiastically, unapologetically, unequivocally support Bill 24. We support LGBTQ kids, we support gay-straight alliances, we support fundamental human rights, and I encourage every single member of this Assembly to do the same.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

10:40

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll try to be brief as I've spoken a fair amount to this bill, but I want to iterate one thing. This bill is about one thing and one thing only, protecting our LGBTQ-plus youth.

I'm very tired of these misrepresentations of the truth. These aren't even alternative facts, Madam Speaker. These are outright mistruths. I've spoken to hundreds of adults who have said that this

bill would have helped them in school, and I have spoken to many, many students who have said to me that this bill will help them and their friends.

Now, for the benefit of the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View I'd be happy to read section 50.1 as it presently reads:

50.1(1) A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.

That's (1). The section that we're adding is (4), so I'll skip (2) and (3).

(4) For greater certainty, this section does not apply with respect to the establishment or operation of a voluntary student organization referred to in section 16.1 or the organizing or holding of an activity referred to in section 16.1.

The words I really want to highlight are "for greater certainty." The leader of the UCP is constantly saying that these student-led clubs are a way for the ATA to covertly teach sexual education. That is why this section is needed, because there is misinformation that is being spread by Jason Kenney. This is to ensure that our youth are not being outed, that schools are not finding ways to get around asking parents for permission.

The Member for Calgary-South East brought up an interesting point yesterday. He asked if schools would still be allowed to notify parents if a child is at risk of harming themselves or others, and the answer is yes. Now, I have experience with this. When I told my drama teacher, who knew I was gay, that I wanted to kill myself, he had to tell the guidance counsellor, so he did. He didn't tell her why I wanted to kill myself as he didn't know and, quite honestly, neither did I. The guidance counsellor then told my mother and didn't mention my sexual orientation because it really didn't matter. This bill will not change that. Let me repeat: this bill will not change that.

This bill will help protect our youth. This bill will make sure that our LGBTQ-plus youth don't have to worry about being outed if they need to tell someone that they're thinking of harming themselves. From experience I can tell you that that is liberating. At the time my mother knew of my sexual orientation, so I didn't have to worry about being outed, but not everyone has the same history that I do. No one's coming out is the same, and no one should be rushed into coming out.

It's our job as legislators to ensure our youth are safe. It's our job to legislate. That's what we're doing with this bill. That's why I'm proud to come to work every day. Our youth need us. Our youth deserve to have their legislators on their side. That's what they have with this government, but I am so disappointed with the Official Opposition, Madam Speaker. When I first spoke to this bill, I was angry. I was incredibly angry. I did not think that the Official Opposition was going to vote against this bill. I thought we had moved along from this. I thought that the UCP, the Wildrose, and the PCs had learned.

When Bill 10 came out, I was also very upset. I remember viciously tweeting at the now current Minister of Infrastructure about how upset I was. The bill led me to call my MLA, who at the time was Heather Forsyth. I called her office and told her staff that I wanted her to vote against the original Bill 10. I remember crying on the phone, telling her staff why this bill was important to me, why this bill was needed, and how it would have helped me when I was in school. After that call her staff assured me that she was going to vote against the bill. Now the UCP seems to easily forget that Bill 10 did not have unanimous consent of both legacy parties and all of its members, as has been stated. There were two former Wildrosers who crossed to the PCs who could not support the bill and so abstained from the vote.

I point this out not to shame the two members but to, one, correct the record and, two, show that the UCP are not moving forward when it comes to LGBTQ-plus rights but backwards. We had two members who decided to abstain from the last vote, and now we have an entire caucus who thinks that voting against LGBTQ rights is perfectly fine. We have a whole caucus, we have 26 members of this House who believe that voting against LGBTQ rights, who believe that voting against our youth is perfectly fine, who think that homophobia has a place in this House, and I can tell you that you're wrong. There are two sides to this. There's the right side of history, and there's Jason Kenney's Alberta. We here on this side of the House and even on part of that side of the House are happy to state that homophobia does not have a place in this province.

On a nonpartisan level I'm just so disappointed. This is a nonpartisan issue, and I wish it would get unanimous consent from this House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to take an opportunity to speak to a particular aspect of this debate that has disconcerted me over the time that I've been listening to it over the last week or so. The points that have been brought up by the opposition have been refuted quite well and eloquently by many members on our side of the House, so I won't repeat all of those.

The piece that is upsetting to me is the use of misdirection that has been happening in this debate. The fact that we bring together a bill that simply is protecting the rights of young people to be able to attend a club without danger of being outed before their time – and as a parent I know that very often even if I do know something about my children, I don't necessarily go to them and confront them with it because as a parent I know they need the time to get the courage up or to think their way through it, to settle on their words in order to come forward and tell me things. I think it's just a natural part of parenting to understand that children need their time and their place and their rhythm and their process in order to move forward.

The basic intent of this bill is not inconsistent with good parenting. It's not inconsistent with the laws in this land. What the opposition has done instead, because there's nothing intrinsically wrong with where we're going, is that they've employed a bunch of misdirection. They've brought up ideas that are simply not in the bill and then refuted those ideas as if they were in the bill.

For example, they've talked about GSAs including curriculum. Nowhere in the bill does it suggest that there be a curriculum for GSAs. They misdirect with that. They brought up the idea that GSAs are sex clubs. Ridiculous on its face, but also nowhere in the bill does it prescribe them to be sex clubs, but they misdirect in order to be able to have something to refute. They talk about GSAs including five-year-olds. Nowhere in the bill does it talk about including five-year-olds, but they misdirect. It's this point of misdirection that I think is very concerning here. Even this morning we heard a little bit more about section 50.1(4), talking about it as if it's somehow an amendment of the School Act, but nowhere in the bill does it suggest that we amend the School Act. Again a misdirection.

That brings me to the point that I want to speak about today, and that is the fact that there are many things that are different between me and the Hon. Jason Kenney, but I can tell you that one of the things that's different is that I actually finished my theology degree.

So I'd just like to take a moment to speak to the theology a little bit behind this.

Thank you for the gift of the Holy Bible I received in my office just this week, in fact, perhaps a message from God.

I know, in having read through both my New Testament and Old Testament classes, that Jesus himself never once spoke against homosexuality. At no point did he say that homosexuality was bad or wrong. Now, Jesus was not a fragile man. He didn't avoid topics because they were scary to him. He did speak out against the accumulation of wealth. He did speak out about issues of poverty, the very things that we bring up in this House all the time. He associated with tax collectors and prostitutes. He was not fragile, and as God I suspect that he didn't just forget to talk about homosexuality. I suspect his memory is pretty good.

Here I am, then, left wondering: what is the basis for this kind of anger toward homosexuality? I realize that it has nothing to do with the New Testament. Take us back to the Old Testament, and take us back to Leviticus, where it is suggested in Leviticus 18:22: "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman."

If that is the basis for the argument here as to why someone would be against LGBTQ rights, then using the principle of misdirection that I've witnessed across the floor all the time, I can also assume that if you're accepting that line from Leviticus, you're also accepting other lines from Leviticus. I'd just like to take an opportunity to read into the record some of the other things that Leviticus suggests. Now I know that the members opposite in the House are in favour of these things as well because they are in Leviticus. For example, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge." I assume none of the farmers on the other side have actually cleared their fields in the time that they've been farmers.

10:50

I also understand that in Leviticus it indicates that you should not plant two different crops in the same field. So I gather that nobody on the other side in the farm community is into crop rotation at all. I do appreciate that.

Continuing the misdirection that I've been educated in by the members opposite in the House, I'd like to point out that Leviticus 19 says that "If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made." You'll notice that it doesn't say that slavery is bad; it just says simply that if you have sex with your slave, you shouldn't kill the slave. It seems to me that in continuing this misdirection, the opposition is clearly in favour of slavery, something I didn't realize until this particular event, something that I find a bit confining.

One last little piece I might add in here, Leviticus 19:27, in case you're following along in your own Bibles: "You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard." I'm a little disconcerted to find so many beardless people across the floor here since they seem to have defied the Bible itself.

"You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead" or tattoo yourself. I'm very interested in hearing the opposition's complaints and concerns about allowing tattoos in society and their speeches asking us to shut down tattoo parlours to be consistent with their belief system.

Now, Madam Speaker, of course I'm being absurd in my commentary here because I want to say that I have found the discussion from the other side to be completely absurd. We have put together a simple bill, a simple bill that recognizes that human beings have rights. Human beings include human beings of every age. The right to be able to engage in a process of coming out that is consistent with your personal emotional needs is a right that I

think we need to protect. That is all this bill is about. It's about protecting children so that they can make the choices that they need to make.

I'm very happy to stand on the side of the House that protects human rights, that is concerned about people and how they express themselves. I use "misdirection" to point out the absurdity of the misdirection on the other side. Very discouraged to hear comments about sex clubs, about five-year-olds, about curriculum, all of which are patently false, and I stand here to accuse the other side of that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? No questions or comments.

Any further speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Education to close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the debate on Bill 24. It's been edifying and illuminating. Certainly, not just members of this House have learned a lot; I think that all Albertans have as well.

Our government has made it clear that we are committed to ensuring that all students, no matter what school they attend, have welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments. We do this by strengthening legislation that supports students that wish to create or join a gay-straight or queer-straight alliance. Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, is about one thing and one thing only. It's about protecting some of the most vulnerable kids in our province.

Madam Speaker, this bill would ensure that no student would be outed. We know that parents, of course, love and support their children and that they play a critical role in their children's lives and education, but we also know that some students feel safer and more comfortable talking about these issues with their peers.

The UCP claims that this bill somehow is all about wedge politics or creating a political distraction. Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth, and that itself, that assertion, is very illuminating about how they feel about these very vulnerable students.

This bill, Bill 24, emphasizes that students have the right to create and choose the name of their clubs, GSA or QSA, and that school principals must help students create these clubs in a timely manner and appoint a staff supervisor so that students can have access to peer support when they need it in a timely manner. This bill also makes it clear that every school in Alberta that receives public dollars will follow the law.

Mr. Speaker, our government knows the positive difference student organizations can have for youth, and I know very well that these alliances can in fact save lives. I visited a number of GSAs throughout my time as Education minister. I was in Fort Saskatchewan just yesterday visiting a club, and it was fantastic.

In April 2016 I had the honour of hosting here at the Legislature several students from GSAs across Alberta. Some of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle joined me in speaking to these youths. We heard first-hand from students about their work and the work of GSAs. Across the province these alliances provide safe havens for students to be themselves and to talk about things that matter to them.

Madam Speaker, let me be clear. What those students want to talk about is about homework, about school, about combatting bullying, and looking after each other. It's a safe sanctuary for these kids, and we all know just how important that is.

Students who join GSAs just want to be regular kids. They know that they need a safe space for themselves and for others. They look

after each other, and they stick together. Let's not forget about allies that join these clubs as well, creating an alliance with students, with their friends, creating a whole school community, Madam Speaker, that is a safer and more just place for all kids. We know it creates a better atmosphere for every student in the school where there's a GSA.

We are talking about basic student rights here and that you must provide a safe space where every student can feel safe. Why would we not do this? Madam Speaker, this is reason enough to ensure that each and every school create a GSA or QSA should a student ask for one.

They have also told me that GSAs gave them the courage to come out to their friends and family.

I urge every single member of the Assembly to do the correct thing this morning and vote to pass Bill 24 without prejudice. Like we've heard from my colleagues, you'll be on the correct side of history. It will be something that you can be of clear conscience and certainly with the best of intentions for all students.

Madam Speaker, this legislation is making waves not just across the province but right across the entire country of Canada. I just watched the Rick Mercer show on my device here, and it was great. It was great support and great comments.

Why would we let students suffer in silence when we can ensure a safe place for them to share their feelings with their peers? Yesterday I spoke to some students, like I said, from Fort Saskatchewan, who had typical issues around junior high, doing their homework, but they also talked about the importance and the safe sanctuary of their GSA, very important for them. It's very important for them to be able to look after each other and to reach out not just in their school but to reach across the whole city to other students in the same situation.

When we are talking about notification, I mean, so many of these provisions within Bill 24 are as a direct result of opposition that we saw to GSAs across the province over the last couple of years. We had to make sure that we put in the provision that students would be in a safe space in a GSA because schools were sending out notifications. If they heard word that there was a GSA, they would send out letters to the whole school, saying: "Warning. Warning. There's a GSA in your neighbourhood." You know, that was hurtful, and it was against not just the spirit but the actual intention of a safe sanctuary of a GSA, so we had to make sure that that was a safe place. It's not an instructional place; it's a support place for students. If anybody tries to spin it in any other way, they're simply going down the road of, as many people have mentioned, misinformation, and that misinformation leads to hurtful and hateful consequences for students.

11:00

You pull that thread a little bit, Madam Speaker, and you will find that talk about notification is because – again, it's that same thing – they're having secret sex clubs, right? I've seen this in very hateful letters and journalism. Ted Byfield put out a horrible, horrible article about this that I found very offensive. Again, you pull that thread, and that's what is being talked about here.

Yeah, of course, we are creating a safe space, a safe sanctuary, with GSAs. No, there will not be a letter going out for students who join that. If they want to be confidential, if they want to have that safe sanctuary for themselves, then we will provide it. That's the law. Anybody who does anything different will be breaking the law, Madam Speaker.

All schools that receive public money must follow the same law, too. There's no exception, right? If you take public money from the province of Alberta for your school, you make sure that you follow the same safe and caring policies as anybody else. We don't make

special exceptions to the law for different people in different circumstances. I think that's a very big step forward, too, and provides the protections that we need.

I ask everybody to please consider supporting this bill. It's a very, very solid bill. We've been working hard on this process over the last number of years. We started with Bill 10, and it was a good step forward, but over the last number of months we have found places where we can make it stronger to make sure that kids are protected, to make sure that we're creating a better Alberta for all students and creating a more equal and socially just place as well. When you provide equality and social justice, Madam Speaker, everybody benefits. All Albertans benefit from that as a result. You know that this government has your back.

Based on that, I will close debate on third reading of Bill 24.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:02 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carlier	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Jansen	Notley
Clark	Kazim	Phillips
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Coolahan	Larivee	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Shepherd
Dang	Luff	Sigurdson
Drever	Malkinson	Starke
Eggen	Mason	Sucha
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Ganley	McPherson	Turner
Goehring	Miller	Westhead
Gray	Miranda	Woollard

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Pitt
Barnes	Hanson	Schneider
Cooper	Hunter	Smith
Cyr	Loewen	Stier
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Strankman
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Yao
Gill	Orr	
Totals:	For – 42	Against – 23

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

11:20

Bill 25

Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Now for something completely different. I am honoured to rise to introduce third reading and speak to Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017.

Madam Speaker, Bill 25 responds to a request from Alberta's forestry professionals to merge their two organizations into one. Together Alberta's foresters and forest technologists ensure the proper management of our forested lands. Our government is

committed to working closely with both professions to ensure they continue to provide the highest level of forestry services in the country. There are currently 1,600 Albertans who identify either as a forester or a forest technologist. If passed, Bill 25 will amend the act to merge two regulatory bodies, the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists, into one regulatory organization, the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals.

Both organizations have been asking this government as well as the previous government to make these changes since 2014, Madam Speaker, and I'm very proud to be able to respond to their call with this bill. Over 90 per cent of members of both organizations approved merging prior to approaching government to request legislative changes. Since 2015 the organizations have been sharing office space and a new name. Alberta Labour has worked closely with both organizations and has consulted with them regularly on the details of these proposed changes. Their request also has the strong support of the Alberta Forest Products Association, the voice for the forest products industry.

Merging the two organizations into one body would eliminate any confusion around the two organizations that provide the same service. The professions' governing regulations would also be consolidated from three into one. This will save valuable resources in time and money. The merger would also improve administrative and disciplinary processes to be more modern and efficient without sacrificing the principles of fairness. Complaints against a member would move to a central governing committee rather than to a single individual. Work would be shared among members, creating administrative efficiencies.

The membership would continue to consist of the many industry professionals but would now also include public members who are residents of Alberta. These public members would add a level of oversight and public accountability that is standard practice for professional associations.

The amendments would also allow investigations into complaints even after a complaint had been withdrawn or settled. Such action, when warranted, would better serve the public interest.

Madam Speaker, by consolidating these organizations into one governing body, there will be an even stronger and more unified voice for our forestry professionals. Creating one regulatory body and removing confusion around the two organizations offering the same services and the consolidation of the professions' governing legislation to an act supported by a single regulation as opposed to the current three regulations will make things easier for government and for our vibrant forestry industry.

Madam Speaker, as previously mentioned, they have been calling for these changes since 2014. They are supportive, and they are excited to move forward together. I ask all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of third reading of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and speak to Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017. I spoke to this bill in second reading. I supported it then, and I'll be supporting it in third reading today. As we by now, I'm sure, are all aware, the proposed amendments in Bill 25 will merge the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists in order to create a single regulatory entity. That entity will be named the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals under the Regulated Forestry Profession Act.

There are about 1,600 professionals that represent the forestry profession in Alberta which identify as either forest technologists or foresters. The fact is that the biggest difference between these folks that are members of either college is education. Foresters have a degree whereas technologists have a diploma or a certificate.

Now, Bill 25 proposes a number of amendments to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, which are being brought forward to implement the merger of the two professional bodies. It seems that this proposed merger of the two colleges began with a memorandum of understanding, an MOU, back in 2013, and in June of the following year the memberships voted overwhelmingly to advance with the projected fusion of these two colleges. The fact is that more than 80 per cent of foresters and 90 per cent of forest technologists who actually took part in the vote determined that moving forward was the right thing to do.

Actually, this unification has been the result of hard work over several years between these two organizations. Consultations and approval were sought from both colleges' memberships prior to them approaching the Department of Labour and asking for the changes.

Both of these colleges since that vote in 2014 have once again approached the government to officially request that the Legislative Assembly allow the merger of these two organizations. Once again, it's important to reiterate that the two organizations have reaffirmed their interest in merging since 2014. They've also been holding AGMs together for some time and have combined some administrative functions, things such as sharing office space and also putting together organizational newsletters.

Generally speaking, when we talk about a merger between two professional bodies, we begin to think of what the costs may be in order to accomplish such an action, and we think about the costs that will be incurred by the government of Alberta in order to complete such a task. As it turns out, there will be no cost to the province at all in order to see these two organizations merge. The foresters and forest technologists have been basically operating as one entity for some time, and all expenses that are incurred in this union will be borne by the two colleges. No taxpayer is on the hook on this one.

They certainly have done their due diligence here, Madam Speaker. The kind of consultation these organizations gave their stakeholders would provide a high benchmark for some governments, for sure. Not only was there lots of time to show that there was an overwhelming desire to amend the act, but as I stated in my previous speech, they gave ample notification, and the fact is that, to our knowledge, no groups have come forward with concerns.

Madam Speaker, I said it before, that amending this legislation is a no-brainer. It's what the colleges and their membership want, and it is incumbent upon us to respect that. I'll be voting for this bill and encourage my colleagues on both sides of the House to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise and speak in favour of this bill. You know, just a personal story. When I grew up, of course, the terminology for forestry professionals was a little bit different. A little bit. We used to call them lumberjacks when I was a kid. Of course, as a child I long dreamed of being a lumberjack, rushing down the wild rivers of British Columbia with my best girlie by my side. Unfortunately, life has taken a different turn, and I find myself as a member of the Alberta Legislature. But I'm proud to stand with the government,

who is saying to the lumberjacks of this province that they are lumberjacks and they are okay. Whether they're cutting down trees, whether they're eating their lunch, whether they're going to the lavatory, whether they're going shopping on Wednesdays and having buttered scones for tea, they are lumberjacks and they are okay. Our government has their backs, and I'm proud to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Labour to close debate.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all speakers to this bill. I very much appreciate the support that this bill has received, and I move to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

11:30 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 27 Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to propose an amendment on behalf of the government to this piece of legislation, and I have the requisite number of copies here. Would you like me to read out the amendment in detail?

The Chair: As soon as I get a copy, then you can proceed.

This will be known as amendment A1.

Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that the bill be amended as follows: In clause A section 1(4) is amended (a) in the proposed section 23.97 (i) by striking out subsection 23.97(1)(a) and substituting the following:

(a) the person holds

- (i) a senior official position, section 23.925 applies, or
- (ii) a senior official position referred to in section 23.926(1), sections 23.925 and 23.926 apply,

or

(ii) by striking out subsection 23.97(2)(a) and substituting the following:

- (a) the person holds a senior official position, sections 23.925 and 23.926 apply, according to their terms, to the person, or

(b) in the proposed section 23.971(2) by striking out "the code of conduct referred to in the terms of employment of the official in effect immediately before the relevant date" and substituting "the code of conduct, if any, in effect immediately before the relevant date."

Now, Madam Chair, I'm sure that it's all perfectly clear to everyone exactly what's happening, but for those at home I would just like to make a few comments with respect to this amendment.

The bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to APAGA, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, would be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Currently, as of November 1 there are 136 such agencies. Also included in this list would be three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries and Covenant Health.

Bill 27 proposes a number of prescribed elements that would apply to employees and board members of all applicable public agencies. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have codes of conduct that include these prescribed elements.

At this time I'd like to mention that it is important to note that this amendment is focused on the transitional provisions and does not impact the broader policy, intent, or effect of the bill. This amendment deals primarily with the application of the transitional provisions to board chairs.

The proposed amendment is composed of two changes, clause A(a) and clause A(b). First, it amends the transitional provisions under section 23.97 to make clear that the concurrent employment provisions are limited to CEOs and other designated positions. As currently worded, it would have applied to all chairs as well.

Second, it amends section 23.971(2) to ensure that chairs who are not subject to an employment contract are also covered by this transitional provision. Unless amended, the transitional provisions will misapply certain provisions to board chairs, undermining the intention of some of the legislated requirements.

Madam Chair, I'm sure that that elucidates fully and completely the nature of the amendment, but just for the further interest of hon. members, I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie has a more fulsome description of the amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much. We've introduced these amendments just for the sake of clarity, but before I go on to specifically speak about the amendment, I want to recap, just to make sure that we have everything that we're trying to address here in Bill 27, which has several key sets of provisions, which I'd just like to outline at this time.

The bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act would also be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Currently, as of November 1, there are 136 such agencies, and also included in this list would be three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries and Covenant Health.

Bill 27 proposes a number of prescribed elements that would apply to employees and board members of all applicable public agencies. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have codes of conduct that include these prescribed elements. All APAGA agencies would be required to submit updated codes of conduct reflecting these prescribed elements to the Ethics Commissioner within four months of the act being proclaimed. The Ethics Commissioner will review all revised codes to ensure that they meet the requirements of the act and sign off by March 31, 2019. Agencies would have to publish their new codes of conduct no later than April 30, 2019.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. For all agency board members and employees, the core requirements would be a baseline standard, enforced through codes of conduct that public agencies would be required to implement. Public agencies could have additional restrictions, but these are the ones that all agencies would be required to implement.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs which include restrictions on private interests, restrictions on using influence, restrictions on using insider information, and disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest.

There is an additional core statutory requirement that would apply to CEOs and equivalents: restrictions on concurrent employment and holding other offices. This additional core

statutory requirement would take effect immediately for new hires, upon reappointment, or following a two-year notice period.

CEOs and equivalents of significant agencies would also be subject to additional statutory requirements upon designation, including restrictions on holding stocks and other public securities; disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner, including financial disclosure; postemployment restrictions, specifically a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. These additional statutory requirements would be set out in the act, but the positions that they would apply to would be designated in a separate order in council and come into effect on contract renewals and new appointments.

Where current contracts are longer term, a two-year transition period would apply so that within two years all CEOs and board chairs would be subject to these enhanced requirements. Through orders in council cabinet would have the ability to add or exempt agencies and positions from any of the conflict-of-interest requirements.

We propose a statutory requirement for all public agencies to have codes of conduct with the required elements.

To enhance oversight and enforcement, we also propose to apply the restrictions on furthering private interests, using influence, and using insider information as statutory requirements within the Conflicts of Interest Act. These restrictions would be carried out through orders in council and would apply to board chairs and CEOs of public agencies on contract renewals and new appointments. There would be a two-year transition period to ensure that CEOs with longer term contracts would also come under the new requirements within the two-year time frame rather than on expiration of their contract.

11:40

The Ethics Commissioner would have the authority to receive and review disclosures from designated CEOs and their equivalents; reduce requirements for restrictions on public securities and restrictions on postemployment; investigate alleged breaches of the act by board chairs, CEOs, and other designated senior positions; issue reports; make recommendations to the responsible minister and/or board; and review public agency codes of conduct to ensure they meet the statutory requirements set out in this bill. As well, disclosure information submitted to the Ethics Commissioner will remain confidential.

The amendment we have introduced is focused on the transitional provisions and does not impact the broader policy, intent, or effect of the bill. This amendment deals primarily with the application of the transitional provisions to board chairs.

The proposed amendment is composed of two changes, clause A(a) and clause A(b). First, it amends the transitional provision under 23.97 to make clear that the concurrent employment provision is limited to CEOs and other designated positions. As currently worded, it would have applied to all the chairs as well.

Second, it amends 23.971(2) to ensure that chairs who are not subject to an employment contract are also covered by this transitional provision. Unless amended, the transitional provision will misapply certain provisions to board chairs, undermining the intention of some of the legislated requirements.

I look forward to questions and ask for full support of the bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any questions or comments on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the speakers. I just have some questions and some concerns and some comments

that, hopefully, can be addressed. Obviously, we're having an amendment in case some chairs of ABCs or Covenant Health or Alberta Health Services' boards that are being added, I guess, can't comply with the concurrent employment conditions that the new Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, is going to have.

I'm wondering if anybody on the government side can state some specifics. Is there somebody specifically that's a chair of one of the 36 agencies, boards, and commissions or Covenant Health or one of the I believe it is three new Alberta Health Services' commissions that will be included in this that will have a conflict in the four-month period where they have to submit their conflict rules to the Ethics Commissioner, which the Ethics Commissioner has, give or take, a year to review and approve? Are we doing this for somebody specifically?

It opens up, Madam Chair, the concern that I've had with this Bill 27 from the start. Absolutely, Albertans have told me everywhere, every day to reduce conflicts of interest, eliminate them, to make it so that we have the best people working for Albertans in our agencies, boards, and commissions. That's not going to be hard because everywhere I go, Albertans are willing to selflessly give their time, their effort, their advice, to work hard to make sure that that happens, and to give the opportunity for all Albertans to share in our prosperity, to share in our freedoms, to have the chance to control their lives and make an impact on our communities and our families.

One of the concerns that we had around Bill 27 was: does this do this? I see that there's a lot relying on the regulations that this government is going to come forward with. There's a lot relying on how the Ethics Commissioner and her people interpret things and come up with things, and those are the unintended consequences of what the future of Bill 27 may bring. Again, the strength is that this side of the House and I and every Albertan I talk to were concerned about conflict of interest in the past but know that Albertans all have the best interests of the future generation in mind and are willing to sacrifice for that.

I am kind of wondering, though. I see on today's Order Paper a government motion that the Conflicts of Interest Act be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship. We're scrambling on this side to find out if that is a once-every-five-years happening that has to happen or if this government truly wants more input from Albertans as to how to make Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, as strong as it possibly could be.

I have concerns. It can be done because everybody's heart and head are in the right place, but we're having some situations where the Ethics Commissioner is going to have to rule on concurrent employment disclosure and a year's cooling-off rights, where certain types of work aren't being allowed. Yes, those all are good tools to make things happen.

But does Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, fully protect Albertans so we make sure that the people who are totally willing to serve and sacrifice – say, somebody in the real estate industry or the agriculture industry or the financial industry who just by their nature acquires the expertise that Albertans have to rely on – are going to be able to serve? Are they going to be able to ensure that good knowledge, good advice fully impacts for all Albertans? With Bill 27, in the short, short time we've had that, it's almost impossible to see that that will be protected, and we'll have to rely on the Ethics Commissioner and her people, and we'll have to rely on the government's rules and regulations.

What I'd like to ask the government at this point is: what's up? What's going on? If we're referring the Conflicts of Interest Act to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and it shall be a special committee, can we review even the amendment part? Can

we make sure that we get this bill exactly right or as close to right as any government can for Albertans? What's up? Why are we doing this?

Let's take advantage of consulting with Albertans. I've long thought and I've stood up many, many times in this House, Madam Chair, and said that way, way more of our bills if not all of our bills should go to special committees so that the public can have input, so that second thought can happen, more reflection and input.

At this point in time, again I'm wondering: are there any specific chairs of these 136 ABCs or the new ones being added that will have a conflict for consecutive or I guess it's called concurrent employment provisions during the transition period? Should that be disclosed to fully ensure that, you know, there's not a conflict that may affect Albertans, of course honouring the private citizen's rights to privacy and protection?

Hey, what's going on, government? Why don't we just send all of Bill 27 with this conflict-of-interest amendment to the Resource Stewardship Committee? Let's hear from more Albertans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the questions. First, I would just like to say that there's no specific individual that we're thinking about. What the amendments are really focused on here is making sure that – as you and I both know, we want Albertans that are in specific industries, in nonprofit organizations, people who have a little bit of experience and who want to volunteer for the government – they can have the ability to have that space. I mean, that's what our government is completely focused on and what I'm really proud of.

11:50

As I spoke about in the House yesterday, one of the things that we're really focused on is trying to create more diversity on these boards, agencies, and commissions. I'm very proud to say that I know of two constituents of my own that I referred and to whom I said, "Please apply," because, of course, now the application process is much more transparent, right? They're applying directly as opposed to where, you know, perhaps in the past – I wouldn't want to judge every appointment – it was kind of done internally. The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater said yesterday that it was like an old boys' club. We've created more transparency so that people, when interested in a particular agency, board, or commission, could apply directly. Of course, one of the most important things is making sure that we're addressing diversity and inclusion, which, as you know, are really important to me.

Now, we don't want to stop these people from participating in making important decisions within, you know, our democratic institutions, so what the first amendment is specifically focused on is making sure that chairs are not subject to restrictions on concurrent employment, because oftentimes these positions are either part-time or they're volunteer positions, right? We're making sure that we're getting it right so that individuals from our communities can come and participate in a role that they should be given every right to, and we're making sure to select the best candidates so that we can make sure that those people are giving us insightful information based on the industry that they may be a part of or the experiences that they have had living their lives and participating in both our economy and society.

I'd love to entertain any other questions that members may have.

I will say that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat did bring up the Conflicts of Interest Act. Of course, I want to remind everybody in the House that the Conflicts of Interest Act was

originally sent to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which I had the honour and pleasure of serving on. Of course, I remember that there were quite a few things that we had in common when we were addressing the Conflicts of Interest Act. I think that we got a lot of input from Albertans on the Conflicts of Interest Act. There was a lot of agreement on ways that we could strengthen the Conflicts of Interest Act. Being the chair of Resource Stewardship, I welcome the opportunity to look at that act once again along with colleagues on both sides of the House so that we can make sure that we're strengthening this as we move forward, especially now as it applies to agencies, boards, and commissions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, currently we're on the amendment, and I have a question, actually, regarding the transition nature of this amendment as it applies to the act. Well, I will back up a bit. I'm very happy that this bill is going to go to committee and that we are going to have an opportunity to discuss it at great length and to get stakeholders in the room and hear what they've got to say. I would hope, given that the chair is with us, that there will be a process that is lengthy enough and detailed enough that we can hear from if not all then certainly most of these people involved in ABCs, because my concern is that we could end up with a one-size-fits-all, and the ABCs are simply not that way. They are very unique in their makeup, each and every one of them.

I realize that this amendment that we have before us right now, as was explained, is more or less a transition document to get

some changes made to the bill during the transition time for employees and senior officials within the various ABCs, and I don't find anything wrong with it at all. I think it clarifies some things that we were wondering about. From my point of view, this amendment to Bill 27 is fine, and I will be supporting it as it stands. It's all right.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 27. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, say no. So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Having completed the work of the morning, I would move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:57 a.m.]

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