



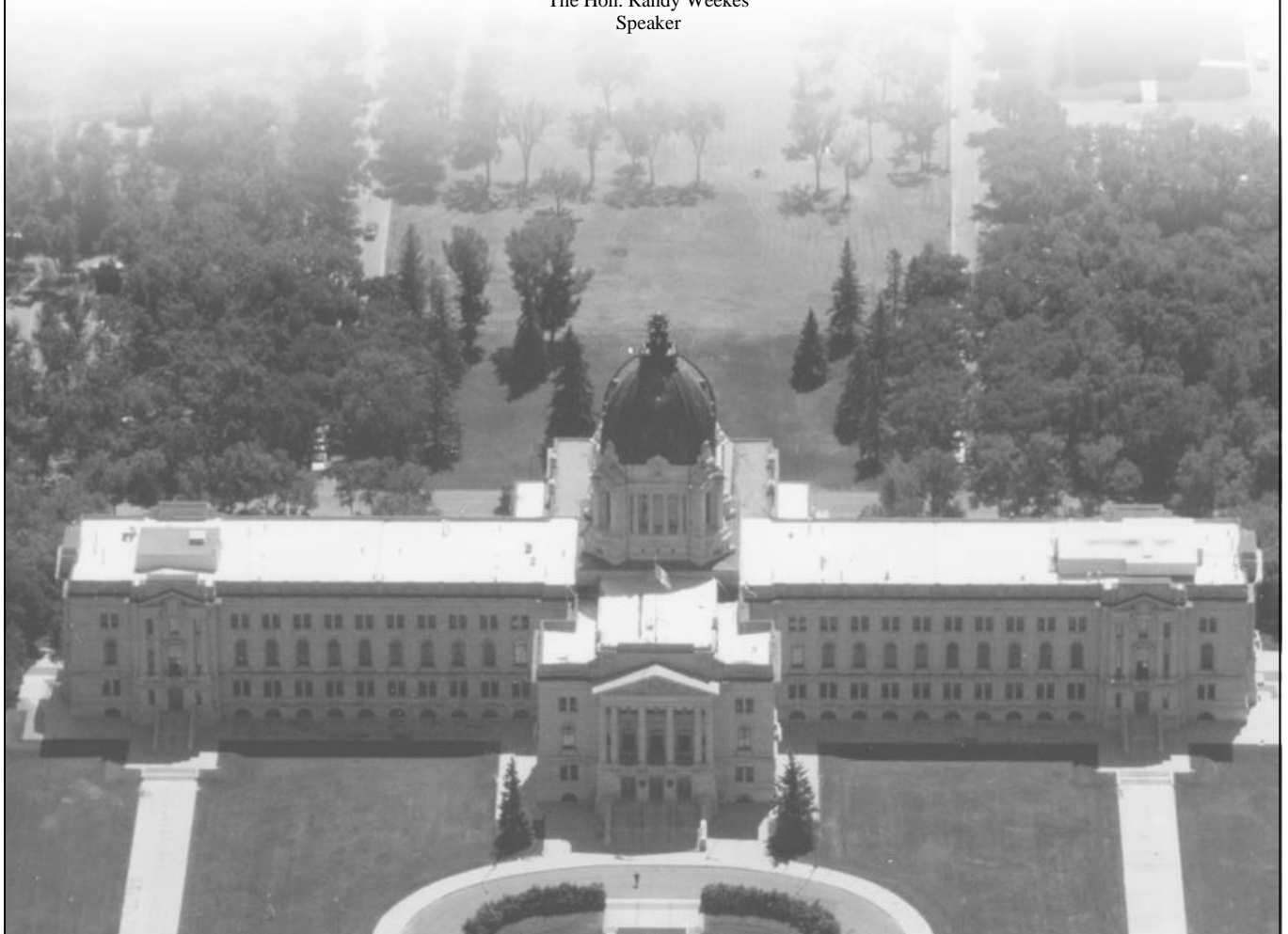
THIRD SESSION — TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
AND
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)
Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Randy Weekes
Speaker



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
3rd Session — 29th Legislature

Lieutenant Governor — His Honour the Honourable Russ Mirasty, S.O.M., M.S.M.

Speaker — Hon. Randy Weekes
Premier — Hon. Scott Moe
Leader of the Opposition — Carla Beck

Beck, Carla — Regina Lakeview (NDP)	Lemaigre, Jim — Athabasca (SP)
Bonk, Steven — Moosomin (SP)	Love, Matt — Saskatoon Eastview (NDP)
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Cheveldayoff, Ken — Saskatoon Willowgrove (SP)	Merriman, Hon. Paul — Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland (SP)
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Cockrill, Hon. Jeremy — The Battlefords (SP)	Morgan, Hon. Don — Saskatoon Southeast (SP)
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Goudy, Todd — Melfort (SP)	Sarauer, Nicole — Regina Douglas Park (NDP)
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Hargrave, Hon. Joe — Prince Albert Carlton (SP)	Steele, Doug — Cypress Hills (SP)
Harpauer, Hon. Donna — Humboldt-Watrous (SP)	Teed, Nathaniel — Saskatoon Meewasin (NDP)
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Harrison, Hon. Jeremy — Meadow Lake (SP)	Vermette, Doyle — Cumberland (NDP)
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Jenson, Terry — Martensville-Warman (SP)	Wilson, Nadine — Saskatchewan Rivers (Ind.)
Kaeding, Warren — Melville-Saltcoats (SP)	Wotherspoon, Trent — Regina Rosemont (NDP)
Keisig, Travis — Last Mountain-Touchwood (SP)	Wyant, Hon. Gordon — Saskatoon Northwest (SP)
Kirsch, Delbert — Batoche (SP)	Young, Aleana — Regina University (NDP)
Lambert, Lisa — Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood (SP)	Young, Colleen — Lloydminster (SP)
Lawrence, Greg — Moose Jaw Wakamow (SP)	

Standings

Government Caucus: Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 46; Opposition Caucus: New Democratic Party (NDP) — 14;
Independent: Saskatchewan United Party (Ind.) — 1

Clerks-at-the-Table

Clerk — Iris Lang
Law Clerk & Parliamentary Counsel — Kenneth S. Ring, K.C.
Deputy Clerk — Kathy Burianyk
Principal Clerk — Robert Park

Sergeant-at-Arms — Lyall Frederiksen

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[The Assembly met at 09:00.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Seeking leave to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — The member has asked for leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you it's an honour to welcome two guests that are seated in your gallery here today, Mr. Speaker. I've introduced one of them before, Thera Nordal, who's a grain farmer north of Southey. Has a welding company there as well with her husband. They're just an awesome family, Mr. Speaker. She's a community coach, Mr. Speaker, and gives back to her community in many ways. She also served as the candidate in the last election in Last Mountain-Touchwood. Just an exceptional person, Mr. Speaker. She played university hockey, Mr. Speaker, back in the day. She's quite the athlete herself, and it's a pleasure to have her here today.

I'd also like to introduce her good friend Colleen Parkin-Kempton, seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, from Langenburg. She works at the K3 mine in Esterhazy, Mr. Speaker. Works as an electrical apprentice, Mr. Speaker, and also is one of the one of the leaders on mine safety, Mr. Speaker. In fact she competed with her team in worlds and placed second in worlds, Mr. Speaker. She lives in Langenburg with her husband, Tim, who's a schoolteacher in Langenburg and also gives back as a coach and a community member in many ways as well.

The two of these friends, Mr. Speaker, played rugby together many years ago. I believe Colleen played as a lock and Thera played as a scrum half. I ask all members of this Assembly to welcome Colleen and Thera to their Assembly.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

Management of Social Housing Units

Ms. Conway: — Yesterday the Premier tweeted about 20 new units planned for North Battleford, claiming a commitment to affordable housing, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot that goes unchecked on the Premier's Twitter account.

What that tweet failed to mention, Mr. Speaker, is that housing affordability and homelessness are a growing crisis across this

province, a problem that is acutely felt in North Battleford right now, and this is a direct result of that Sask Party government's failure to take action on housing, cuts to housing, the failed SIS [Saskatchewan income support] program, and a government sitting on over 600 million of vacant housing units in Saskatchewan while families, seniors, and others are homeless because this government has cut funding for affordable social housing units by hundreds of millions of dollars over the past decade.

While those units sit vacant, the government continues to pay for the utilities and taxes associated with those units to the tune of millions. So the Premier is celebrating a plan to eventually build 20 new units in North Battleford while there are over 140 housing units sitting vacant right now, Mr. Speaker.

The waste and mismanagement of this tired and out-of-touch Sask Party government is nothing short of astounding when at the same time there is an affordability crisis in this province. The seniors and families of our province are sick and tired of watching the public services that they rely on get squeezed and neglected. Three thousand empty social housing units in Saskatchewan, but we're not calling an emergency sitting about that, are we?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Melfort Chiropractor Practising for 63 Years and Counting

Mr. Goudy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a rambunctious boy growing up in Melfort, there was a very well-respected man my mother would take me to from time to time for a straightening out. Our friend Dr. Schulte turns 92 this Friday, and he's been practising chiropractic medicine for 63 years. People from all over the area still seek out his help when in need, and our friend indeed is still treating patients in his office three days a week, with no signs of slowing down.

Over his long career, Dr. Schulte has worked with many sports teams and professional athletes, helping keep them in peak condition. So whether you are an athlete needing to get back on the game or just a parent of an athlete who spent too much time in the bleachers, Dr. Schulte is your friend.

If there was a question to the effectiveness of chiropractic care, Dr. Schulte, with engineers from the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] and his very good friend Gerry Bourgault built some specialized equipment to test patient strength before and after the adjustment. And I'm sure he's had a number of times where he had to straighten Gerry out through his youth as well.

So on behalf of myself and many others who Dr. Schulte has managed to help stand up straight with our shoulders back, I want to congratulate him on a long and successful career, and I want to wish him and his wife all the best in their years ahead. Happy birthday, Dr. Schulte and thank you. And in your words, just relax. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Douglas Park.

Camp Easter Seal Provides Inclusive and Fun Experience

Ms. Sarauer: — Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today and recognize the work of SaskAbilities in organizing and hosting the Camp Easter Seal this summer. On July 19th, I had the opportunity to attend Easter Seal Camp Day at Manitou Beach, along with the Deputy Premier.

Camp Easter Seal offers the outdoor summer camp experience for children, youth, and adults experiencing disability in Saskatchewan. It's a place where campers can explore, grow, and build friendships and independence. This safe, warm, fun, and supportive environment fosters inclusion and belonging, a place where campers are the centre of all that they do.

As the only completely wheelchair-accessible camp facility in Saskatchewan, Camp Easter Seal is dedicated to providing a fun and barrier-free experience to all campers. Camp Easter Seal began with operations at various locations in 1954. And in 1956, Camp Easter Seal moved to its current location, the shores of Little Manitou Lake at Manitou Beach near Watrous.

Camp Easter Seal serves hundreds of campers annually, employs dozens of summer staff including nurses, cooks, counsellors, and program staff.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing Camp Easter Seal for their excellent service to the residents of Saskatchewan and for providing an inclusive experience of fun and making long-lasting memories. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Construction Begins on New Long-Term Care Home in Grenfell

Mr. Bonk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 2nd, I along with the Minister of Rural and Remote Health, the member from Melville-Saltcoats, dignitaries, and members of the community were at a sod turning for the brand new long-term care home in Grenfell.

Mr. Speaker, our government made a commitment to providing long-term care services in Grenfell, and I'm pleased to say that we're delivering on that promise. The Minister of Rural and Remote Health spoke of how the new Grenfell long-term care home will allow residents to remain in their home community.

The new 33-bed facility will include two spa-tub rooms, a commercial kitchen, common living and dining spaces, administrative areas, and a maintenance garage. I agree with the mayor of Grenfell, Rod Wolfe, who stated that the positive spinoffs of this project truly cannot be measured, either economically, financially, or for the well-being of the residents.

His council and the health care foundation are looking forward to working with the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority], SaskBuilds, and contractor Scott Builders throughout the construction and into the future towards the opening of the new home in 2025.

Integrated rural health physician Dr. Johann Roodt said that the community is now able to see the construction of a beautiful

building that will become home to so many for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank everyone involved in this project. It's been a priority for our government. And we look forward to when we can welcome residents of Grenfell and area to their new long-term care home. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood.

Saskatoon Achievement in Business Excellence Awards

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this year marked the 28th annual celebration of business in the greater Saskatoon region, the SABEX [Saskatoon Achievement in Business Excellence] Awards. The member from Saskatoon Willowgrove and I attended the Greater Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce awards gala last Thursday.

I had the honour of presenting the Community Investment Award to Saskatchewan Blue Cross. This award is presented to a business whose donations, sponsorships, and volunteerism has made a difference in the city of Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, this year's prestigious SABEX Hall of Fame award was presented to Saskatoon Business College. From the time of its founding in 1907 to present day, under the leadership and ownership of the Chapman family, SBC [Saskatoon Business College] has been a gateway for thousands of graduates to enter the workforce, gain meaningful employment, and launch successful and productive careers.

The business of the year award went to Aspen Films, the mistahi mamcihitowin award winner was Discover Saskatoon. Prairie Cranewon the Safety Culture award. The Small Business Growth award went to SKN Med Spa. Reclaim Maternity Baby Kids was awarded the New Business award, and the Prairie Grazer took home the Spirit of Saskatoon award.

As a former board member of Saskatoon Friendship Inn, I was pleased the Inn won the Community Impact award. Vendasta was chosen as Industry Leader of the Year, and Family Business of the Year went to Butler Byers Insurance. Congratulations to all the award nominees and winners from this year's SABEX awards. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Muskwa Lake Wellness Camp Provides Support to Northern Residents

Mr. Lemaigre: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early this fall the Premier and Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and I attended announcement of the Muskwa Lake wellness centre in Pinehouse. Mr. Speaker, early in the '70s, Pinehouse was the subject of a documentary that captured the high rate of alcohol abuse in the community. People from the community like Leonard McCallum had a vision for his community to reclaim and recover from the abuse of alcohol. Muskwa Lake Wellness Camp has been operating since then with the support of the community.

Mr. Speaker, I was proud to be a part of this government and the

nearly million-dollar commitment, in partnership with Kineepik Métis Local 9 that operates Muskwa Lake wellness centre. The committed dollars allow the camp to continue providing northern residents with cultural and mental health and addictions support. The funding will be used to build three cabins and a main lodge and operational funding.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote wellness manager Kimberly Smith who said, “When we talk about suicide, family dysfunction, lack of employment, what our program does is try to build up the individual by not just addressing one component of their life.”

Mr. Speaker, I would like all members to join me in thanking Muskwa wellness centre for all that they do for northern Saskatchewan. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Kindersley.

Wholesale Trade Growth Shows Economic Success

Mr. Francis: — Mr. Speaker, I’m happy to be on my feet to share even more great news for Saskatchewan’s strong economy. The latest numbers from StatsCan show the value of wholesale trade has increased 57 per cent year over year. The total value of wholesale trade was \$6.8 billion in August 2023. And, Mr. Speaker, we also saw an increase of 12.4 per cent month to month for wholesale trade. That increase ranks first in the nation.

Mr. Speaker, wholesale trade growth is a key element to ensuring the province’s economy continues to grow. These numbers further demonstrate that Saskatchewan is a sustainable and reliable provider of food, fuel, and fertilizer to customers across the country and around the globe.

Mr. Speaker, what we see under this government is an economic record to be proud of. We are proud of the limitless potential in the form of jobs, economic growth, and opportunities here at home. Since 2007 this government has been focused on enabling growth and success here in the province and removing us from the have-not place it was under the NDP [New Democratic Party] to the success story that is Saskatchewan. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Education Policy and Resignation of Human Rights Commissioner

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday one of Saskatchewan’s human rights commissioners, Heather Kuttai, resigned because of this government’s decision to violate the rights of young people. In her letter she says about this bill, and I quote, “It’s something that I cannot be a part of, and I will not be associated with a provincial government that takes away the rights of children, especially vulnerable children.”

Mr. Speaker, I wonder what the Premier has to say in response to that.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, I would say very much thank you for her service at the Human Rights Commission and wish her the very best in all that she chooses.

Mr. Speaker, we must remember as we have a very public discussion about the province stepping in, standardizing, and making a policy consistent across our school divisions, that this is the policy that historically in the province has largely been in place by policy or by practice in our classrooms, in our schools, as well as across our school divisions for the last number of decades, Mr. Speaker.

[09:15]

So most certainly, yes, a public discussion that’s . . . Mr. Speaker, most certainly a public discussion that is happening today as the province does step in, makes consistent a policy that has largely been in place across the province for decades now.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, a status quo scenario that requires an emergency sitting and the use of the notwithstanding clause. I suggest that this government, this tired and out-of-touch government, stop and listen. They should listen to Justice Megaw and they should listen to the Children’s Advocate and they should listen to the thousands of parents who have spoken out against this policy. And, Mr. Speaker, they should listen to Heather Kuttai. In her letter, she warned that if this bill passes with the notwithstanding clause, I quote, “Saskatchewan will no longer be a place that takes care of all of its kids.”

How many more parents, how many more people need to speak out before this Premier changes course?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, we are listening to parents. We’re listening to executive directors of school divisions, as well as many others across the province. I’ll quote the director of education for the South East Cornerstone Public School Division, Mr. Keith Keating. And he says . . . Mr. Speaker, I’ll go on to quote:

The majority of what seems to be included in the press release on the new legislation is already either in *The Education Act* or is in policy as current practice.

Mr. Keating goes on to say:

I think the major difference appears to be the policy regarding pronouns and name changes for trans youth. We have always had a default position in this school division that parents should be involved regardless of the age in these discussions. One of the questions that’s asked by schools is, do your parents know, and if they don’t, can we help you in having that conversation?

Mr. Speaker, he goes on:

The only time we wouldn’t have shared that information in the past is when there was a safety concern for the student. I can only think of a handful of occasions in my many years

of education, and most of those cases would have been students over the age of 16.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

**Cost of Living, Affordability Measures,
and Education Policy**

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the Premier is aware that a status quo scenario, he's talking against his own reasons for being here in an emergency sitting. This is a government that clearly, clearly has tunnel vision, and they can't even hear the voices outside their own diminishing echo chamber, Mr. Speaker. And they have clearly lost sight of what matters to Saskatchewan people. And nowhere, nowhere is that more clear than when it comes to the cost of living.

Under this Premier, costs keep rising but yet there's no relief in sight. No urgency there. When will the Premier finally deliver some cost-of-living relief to Saskatchewan people?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, most certainly when it comes to the policy that we have developed and made consistent across the province, which largely was consistent by policy or in practice across the province, that was precipitated when one of our school divisions in the province changed their policy specifically to exclude parents from this discussion. So we have made consistent what was in practice, Mr. Speaker, or in policy largely across the province.

When it comes to affordability in the province, the Minister of Education has discussed many times on the floor of this legislature and the rotunda, across the province the \$2 billion that is annualized each and every year in provincial budgets, Mr. Speaker, taking 112,000 people off the tax rolls, supporting low-income families, supporting Saskatchewan people as we address, yes, affordability challenges at our family level, at the business level, and at our community level, Mr. Speaker.

Most certainly among those affordability challenges and identified by the parliamentary budget officer, the largest, the largest inflationary factor when it comes to groceries and I would say fuel, Mr. Speaker, is a federally imposed carbon tax supported by the members opposite.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Beck: — Mr. Speaker, this tired and out-of-touch government has completely, completely lost the plot. Saskatchewan families are relying on them to deliver some relief to the cost of living, but instead, instead they've recalled us here, Mr. Speaker, for an emergency session of the legislature, offered no relief on power and utility bills, no relief on their taxes and fees, just more division, more division to distract from their failures, at the expense of vulnerable kids no less.

Why won't that Premier stop with the political games and finally deliver relief to the people of this province who desperately need it right now?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, we don't view standardizing and making consistent an education policy across the province to include parents in their children's education as political games. We consider that, Mr. Speaker, a government that most certainly is representing the people that ultimately have elected us in this province, and the people broadly across the province.

When it comes to affordability, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to affordability, \$500 affordability tax credit cheques sent out to each and every individual in the province last year, yes, to help address affordability concerns that we have at the family level.

Mr. Speaker, we see a reduction in our natural gas bills to people across the province, making our utility bundle in this province the second lowest in the nation of Canada. We see consistent decisions removing 112,000 people off the tax rolls, Mr. Speaker, low-income people paying less tax under this government than they ever did under the NDP to the tune of 2,000 or \$2,500 a year.

We will take no advice — no advice — from a party that actively props up Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau with one of the largest inflationary taxes on Saskatchewan people and Canadians, Mr. Speaker. Will you stand up and ask your leader to remove his support from Justin Trudeau and ultimately remove his support for a federally imposed carbon tax, which is driving up the cost of groceries and the cost of fuel?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Beck: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the Premier start taking some new advice from somewhere because he is so clearly off the mark with where Saskatchewan people are at right now.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is doing worse than nothing on the cost of living. He's actually making things worse. Since 2016 Saskatchewan families are paying \$1,608 more in PST [provincial sales tax] and utilities alone. And, Mr. Speaker, those aren't my numbers. Those numbers come directly from that tired and out-of-touch government.

How much longer? The question is, how much longer will Saskatchewan families wait until they finally see some relief, finally see some connection to the problems that they're facing right now from that tired and out-of-touch government?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Appreciate the comparison, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is, is a family of four making \$50,000 in this province pay \$2,499 less today than they did under an NDP government. Mr. Speaker, that same family of four finding their way to \$100,000 of household family income would still pay \$2,443 less today in PST and provincial income tax than they would under an NDP government back in 2007.

The fact of the matter is this, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP we had education property tax revolts that brought themselves to this very building. We had the highest corporate income tax in the nation of Canada, Mr. Speaker. In 16 years the PST did not go down. It was increased four times, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP we had the seniors' income plan, which was frozen for 16 years, since that time has increased four times. We had no graduate

retention program. We had no seniors' drug plan. We had no children's drug plan. We had no active families benefit, no supports for children with autism, Mr. Speaker, and no supports, I would say, for the people of Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Cost of Living and Fiscal Management

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What a pile of spin from that Premier, Mr. Speaker, who stuck Saskatchewan people with more bills, more hikes, more taxes during a generational cost-of-living crisis. This tired and out-of-touch government has lost its way.

There was a time when that Sask Party knew better than to try and sow division on sensitive issues, and focused on the things that mattered. But now they've got that in reverse. They're so consumed with holding off the member from Sask Rivers, their new north star, Mr. Speaker, that they're distracted and out of touch with the reality that people are facing with the cost of living.

We've called for action on this front. When will people finally see the cost-of-living relief that they so desperately deserve?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, our Premier very adequately answered that question. However I would like to say something more to the absolute no-plan opposition. When he said they have a call for action, they have no plan.

Mr. Speaker, several months ago in May, they came up with this idea. They're going to do a 1 per cent surcharge on our resources, just a little 1 per cent surcharge, additional surcharge. With the parameters they had around it, do you know how much money that they would have raised with their little 1 per cent surcharge? Five million dollars, Mr. Speaker. They predicted that that would give them 250 million. It would have only produced, in actuality, 5 million. That's the great plan of the NDP.

They want to spend more, they want to tax less — so they say, although they taxed more when they were government — and they don't want to borrow money. There is no plan from that group over there. They just complain and criticize.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There we see that Sask Party math on full display again here, Mr. Speaker. They struggled on this from day one. We see it with the Education minister this week of course too, Mr. Speaker. But there's so much that tired and out-of-touch government could be doing to make the cost of living a little bit easier for people, but they couldn't even be bothered to try. Instead they just keep sticking Saskatchewan people with more taxes, more bills, more costs, all driving up the cost of living.

They could be rolling back their PST hikes and expansion, in fact the biggest PST hike in Saskatchewan's history. They could be providing relief to families struggling to pay the power bills after the hike after hike from this Sask Party government. They could

be offering relief on the more than \$1,600 more that families are now paying each and every year because of the choices of that Premier and that out-of-touch Sask Party.

Why won't they do any of that? Why won't they offer the needed and lasting relief that families deserve?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — 450 million, Mr. Speaker. 450 million was invested by this government directly to the people of Saskatchewan to help them with affordability measures, which is far more than the no-plan opposition has ever proposed. Plus the no-plan opposition has no idea how they would pay for what they propose, which was less than we did.

So they can stand on their feet and say, 450 million, that isn't enough, but you need to spend more on education, you need to spend more on health care, you need to spend more everywhere within government. They have no plan how they would pay for it. Oh, by the way, but don't borrow, and reduce taxes. Mr. Speaker, that's not a plan; it's a dream. And the NDP can keep dreaming because they'll never be in government, and that's a great thing with no plan.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Talking about a one-time payment. A billion dollars after a billion dollars after a billion dollars after a billion dollars each and every year that that government is taxing Saskatchewan people with the PST alone, Mr. Speaker. The hard-working people of Saskatchewan don't have a whole lot of time for this Premier's petty political games. They want to see their politicians working on real priorities — health care, classrooms, and the cost of living.

But that's not what we're doing here in this emergency session. We're here because they've recalled the legislature and have thrown out the rule book, all to plow ahead with a bill that violates kids' rights, human rights. They've got the wrong priorities, Mr. Speaker. When will we see that same sense of urgency to finally bring lasting cost-of-living relief to the people of this province?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, in each and every budget we give over \$2 billion cost-of-living relief, as well as the 450 million that I mentioned earlier that directly went to our residents. But do you know what else we did? Last year we wrote down the operating debt — 1.5 billion. And this year, Mr. Speaker, we're writing it down an additional billion. That means we have savings in interest, and that is money that can go into services in the future years. That's a plan, Mr. Speaker. The no-plan opposition is struggling to figure out what the heck they would do.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

[09:30]

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, during the by-election in Regina Coronation Park, I knocked on thousands of doors and I heard from families what they are worried about. Almost every door, I heard people are struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living, and this tired and out-of-touch government is making things worse.

When will the Sask Party help hard-working people in my constituency who are struggling to pay their bills?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to congratulate that member for his win in his constituency and welcome to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, again that question has been answered. When was when we spent in each and every budget over \$2 billion in affordability measures as well as 450 million that was a direct payment to the residents of Saskatchewan. If it's a couple, that's \$1,000, Mr. Speaker.

That addresses a lot of issues. It does not answer them all, we understand. There are inflationary pressures. But what's that member's position on the Trudeau-Jagmeet Singh carbon tax? We would be very interested to know what the new members, what's their position? Do they stand with the NDP that support the carbon tax that is the number one driver of inflation in our economy?

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, people are struggling in our province and government should be helping them. Instead this Premier is spreading division. Families need to break on their groceries, their utility bills, PST this government raised and expanded. Why wouldn't this government focus on helping people with the cost of living instead of dividing us against each other?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, since the member opposite is new to the Assembly, I'd like to tell him to take a look at the budget document. He may not have before now. And look at page 70 and 7, and he will see when taxes, utility rates, and housing are all included, Saskatchewan is, if not the — on different income levels — the most affordable or the second most affordable province in our country.

It's not by accident, Mr. Speaker. It's because of policies that we have within the province. It's a fact that we have the lowest PST of any province that has PST. It's a fact that at most income levels, we have the lowest personal income tax. We have the second-lowest utility bundle. All of that is decisions by this government in order to make life more affordable for not just his constituents, for all of our constituents, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Mr. Clarke: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this tired

and out-of-touch government is failing to deliver when it comes to the cost of living. When I was knocking on doors in Regina Walsh Acres, this was by far the number one concern of voters on the door. Seniors, parents, young people, working families, they're all stressed about the crushing cost of living they face today. And what does this government have to offer them? \$1,608 in new costs since 2016.

How much longer will families in Regina Walsh Acres need to wait before they see some cost-of-living relief from the Sask Party?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I am so happy that member . . . I'm sorry. I want to welcome the new member to his Assembly and for winning in his constituency as well.

Mr. Speaker, I am so happy he brought up seniors. I really am. Along with benefiting from our reduction in the personal income tax, taking many seniors off of the provincial tax roll entirely, and being able to have the second-lowest utility bundle, Mr. Speaker, for low-income seniors, we increased the seniors' income plan not once or twice or three or four times, a number of times. It's quadruple what it was under the NDP. Do you know what? They left it at \$90 a month for 16 years — 16 years, Mr. Speaker. It's now well over \$300 a month. That's what we're doing.

We introduced the personal care home benefit which didn't exist under the NDP. We have introduced it and now increased the threshold for that. We are very supportive of a very strong seniors' drug plan. We have increased the subsidy for ambulance fees. Thank you for the question.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Mr. Clarke: — The people of Regina Walsh Acres and Coronation Park sent a message in those by-elections, but it's crystal clear that this Premier isn't listening at all. The Sask Party's three power bill hikes in less than a year came up the most, Mr. Speaker. Because of the Sask Party's mismanagement of SaskPower, Saskatchewan people are currently paying the second most expensive power bills in the country. Where is the plan to help people with the second-highest power bills in Canada?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You know, again I want to thank the member for that question. And I don't always thank them for their questions. But he wants to talk about power rates. What's his position on the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker? What's his position on that? Well I have a quote from that member, from the member from Walsh Acres. And he says a number of things, but he ends it with this, and I quote: "Why shouldn't consumers actually pay the price of carbon for producing food?"

Mr. Speaker, he has already stated publicly that he supports the carbon tax. He knows what the federal carbon tax and policies will do to energy production within this province, and he supports it. So I wonder how he can explain that. Again even their

new members are no-plan NDP.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Mental Health and Addictions Services for Youth

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, he's been clear; we've been clear. We do not support a federal carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister for Mental Health and Addictions what specific steps he was going to take to address the high rates of suicide for gender-diverse youth, high rates of suicide that will be made worse by this government's legislation that goes against the basic rights of children. That's why the Human Rights Commissioner Heather Kuttai said to the media yesterday . . . That's what she said to the media yesterday, and that's what Sarah Mackenzie came here to say last week.

This government talks about listening to parents. How about listening to the parents who are calling for this plan to be scrapped and for real supports to be put in place for gender-diverse youth?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Mr. T. McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And once again, our government does extend our condolences to the family for the loss of their loved one.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned yesterday, this government does have the mental health capacity building in schools which we are expanding in this year's budget to a total of 10 schools across the province. That includes rural communities like Balgonie, La Ronge, Sandy Bay, Weyburn, Yorkton — urban communities — North Battleford, Prince Albert, Regina.

Mr. Speaker, our new action plan for mental health and addictions will further expand this initiative to an additional five schools in the next budget year with the goal of expanding to at least one school in all school divisions over the next five years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, these people are crying out for help and seeking new actions from this government. Their latest attempt at a mental health and addictions action plan doesn't even address a recommendation that we've seen appear in the 2014 recommendations, in Provincial Auditor's reports, in child advocate reports, and what we're hearing from kids and families who are trying to access care. Of course what I'm referring to, Mr. Speaker, is addressing wait times. Wait times for access to services and supports desperately need to be addressed. Why no mention of wait times in this crucial time, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Mr. T. McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And of course, wait times is directly tied to staffing, and staffing and

human resources is something that this government takes very seriously. And we've got an action plan in place to address that, to increase the staffing both in rural and remote communities and our urban communities, and now with the expansion of our mental health and addictions plan, building capacity in that regard, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 137

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cockrill that **Bill No. 137 — *The Education (Parents' Bill of Rights) Amendment Act, 2023/Loi modificative de 2023 sur l'éducation (Déclaration des droits des parents)*** be now read a second time.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be back here again bright and early this morning to engage in this important debate. Before I get into the details of this legislation this morning, I want to take a minute to thank everyone who makes this building work.

I want to thank our Clerks-at-the-Table, Hansard staff, all of the folks in facilities, our Sergeant-at-Arms, legislative security. It takes a lot to make this building work. And I also want to thank taxpayers for funding all of this. This is an incredible expense to call us back to debate this emergency sitting of the legislature, something that hasn't happened in 25 years, with the support of taxpayers who I think should rightly question the emergency calling of this sitting. But I don't want that to overshadow all of the incredible people who were here very late last night, back again early this morning, putting in just incredible hours in service to this province. From the opposition, we say thank you.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I began my comments yesterday by indicating that I'd like to engage in a reasonable conversation about what matters to people in Saskatchewan. I began yesterday by talking about the word "integrity." And we've seen more media coverage on the resignation of the human rights commissioner who had to look deep at herself. She had to look inwardly at herself, at her own integrity, that she approaches her work and has approached her work for nine years in service to this province and service to human rights, and in service to those who are at risk of having their rights violated. She had to look at the family that she goes home to. She had to look at her children and ask herself the question, can she serve with integrity with a bill like this that will trample on the rights of children? For her, the answer was no. She could not continue in that regard.

I want to honour that decision and offer words that it's inspiring to see a public servant put her belief system into practice and take that brave stance as well as to speak out publicly. I believe it was her child who said, Mom, don't go quietly. And I think that that's

something that inspires many of us, those of us with children, grandchildren, children in our families who we love and care for. And we know how important that role is, that relationship between a parent and a child.

You know, Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago I heard the former minister of Education on the radio with Stefani Langenegger. And he was asked a question, and I think he gave the right answer. So I want members opposite to hear this. He gave the right answer. He didn't give the right answer to many questions that morning, but he gave the right answer to one. She asked him the question, what would you do if one of your children told you that they were trans? Something like that. And the former minister of Education said, I would love them. I would love them.

I applaud that answer from the minister: I would love them. We love our kids. We all love our kids. What we're asking for in this debate is that we consider all parents' love for their children because they want their children to be alive. They want their children to be safe. They want their children to be learning in an atmosphere that affirms who they are, gives them the best chance at education and the best chance at navigating these incredibly difficult years. Let's let parents love their kids. Let's let parents love their kids.

Now last night, Mr. Speaker, I brought copies for government members of several reports. No one indicated that they had read those reports. No one indicated they were interested in reading those reports. I still have copies.

While the former minister of Education is heckling me, I wish that he would maybe pay attention to the words that I'm bringing to this Assembly, as just moments ago I indicated the correct answer that he provided on a radio interview. But he continues to heckle while we talk about just simply loving kids. I'm not sure what he's so worked up about in that regard.

[09:45]

But again, Mr. Speaker, last night I brought 47 copies, 47 copies of the Court of King's Bench decision on the injunction for this policy. I brought 47 copies of the report from the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth. I've received no interest from members of the government in reading those reports. I still have those copies. I'm willing to share them. I've tabled a copy. I'll table a copy of the advocate's report. And I hope that those members opposite will take their jobs seriously, do their homework, read those reports before they vote on this legislation. I think that that would be the professional thing to do. I think it would also be wise for them to consider the ruling of an independent Justice in our court system and an independent officer of this legislature, mandated by all of us. And they should read that report before they vote.

This morning I'd like to return to the advocate's report. I did not make my way through it last night, but I think it's incredibly important as we consider the ramifications for Bill 137. As the advocate indicates in her report — to review some of the content that we did cover last night — that her office undertook the work that the government failed to do, that her office undertook the work of conducting an impact assessment on how this policy would impact young people in Saskatchewan. It was very clear, both from Justice Megaw and from the advocate, that the

government did nothing, nothing, not a single thing, to look into how this bill will impact children and youth.

Well I think those of us on this side find that an absolutely deplorable thing to do, to not even be curious, to not even want to know who will be hurt. In fact all they've done is put a clause in the bill to prevent anyone from holding them responsible for it. It's an indication that they seem to know that this bill could cause harm, but they don't want to take responsibility for the harm that it will cause.

Like it's an unbelievable situation that, before I got into politics, could never imagine I would find myself in. Standing on the floor of the people's building, talking about a government that is going to go down a path at lightning speed with the sledgehammer of the notwithstanding clause to, as quickly as they can, cause irreversible and irreparable harm to children. And to not even have the curiosity to find out. That's what we're dealing with here. So the Children's Advocate undertook much of that work that the government either didn't want to do or didn't think was important.

I'm going to pick up my comments today on page 15. And one of the things that the advocate looks at is if this bill and the policy, the gender and pronoun policy, if it is discriminating based on age. And I think that this is a really important concept that those in the Assembly need to consider. So I'm going to read some sections from the section entitled "Discrimination Based on Age," and I'll offer my comments on some of this as we go through.

On page 15:

Having established that a refusal to use an individual's preferred name and pronouns is discriminatory on its face and that it violates several other rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the question then becomes whether limiting respect for gender identity on the basis of age is justified and/or saved in the Saskatchewan context by subsection 2(2) of *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*. There is no Act or regulation in force in Saskatchewan permitting or requiring an age-based distinction on when and how an individual can express their gender identity.

So the advocate is indicating that this is absolutely new territory to wage into legislation that will use an individual's age as grounds to discriminate against them.

Now again the advocate goes into great detail in other parts of the report. I won't get into that, looking at some of the other precedents that are out there when it comes to the doctrine of a mature minor and the capacity that a young person has to understand their own needs and their own identity. So this is very interesting territory when it comes to understanding how human rights will be violated here.

On the following page, on 16:

Effectively, the Government of Saskatchewan already recognizes the ability of a young person to independently determine the official expression of their gender identity without parental consent based on their capacity to do so

rather than on the arbitrary basis of age. The government also restricts a parent/guardian's ability to access the health record of a child aged 14 years and over on eHealth without the child's consent, which illustrates the government's recognition that a child's right to guidance from their parents/guardian does not guarantee the parent a right-to-know.

Now again, Mr. Speaker, these are the advocate's words, not mine. The advocate is simply recognizing that this government already has in legislation and in policy several instances where they recognize the ability of a minor to make decisions, and that they already recognize in other areas, for example, you know, a child aged 14 and over on eHealth needs to provide consent to share those records with a parent. So there's already lots in legislation and policy that the advocate can look at for direction on whether or not this new policy in this new bill is indeed breaking the child's human rights.

Continuing on:

Additionally, the Ministry of Social Services has policies respecting the preferred name, pronouns, and gender of children and youth in out-of-home care, as self-identified by the child. Respect for a child's gender identity is not dependent on age, and the Ministry of Social Services' policies specifically apply to children under age 16. Notably, preferred names and pronouns are respected on Ministry of Social Services forms and in informal interactions with children in care under section 9 of *The Child and Family Services Act*, wherein parents retain decision-making powers in other areas.

I'll pause there again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this is really interesting. And I think it begs the question: why is this government focusing on changing . . . you know, talking about parental rights only in education? Why have they brought this forward in education? Why have they engaged in campaigns against teachers with billboards to vilify how much teachers make? Why have they engaged in their unwillingness to sit at a bargaining table and talk about 9 out of the 10 things that teachers are concerned about? Why have they underfunded public education for a decade, where we've gone from first in the country in per-student funding to the bottom of the pack? Why? What is it about publicly funded education that this government just simply doesn't care about?

They're showing their disdain when they focus only on education to drive a wedge, for people in the public to question a teacher's motives or to wonder what's happening in those schools. There's something about this government's disdain for publicly funded, delivered education that is showing in the fact that they're allowing these policies to exist in Health, in Social Services, but they're targeting education as a wedge, pitting parents against teachers, parents against parents, teachers against teachers, community against community. It just doesn't make any sense why they're going down this path when the advocate clearly indicates that other ministries have no such policies like the ones they're bringing forward here in *The Education Act*.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I might lose my voice tonight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the advocate goes on to state:

The Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety also has a policy, on which our office was invited to consult, specific to meeting the needs of transgender young offenders related to admission, classification, and placement within correctional facilities. The objective of this policy includes the following statement:

Appropriate classification and placement of transgender offenders will contribute to successful offender management and ensure that the rights of these individuals are respected in accordance with *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*, and for youth, also in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

So here's my question on this. The advocate is indicating that the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety went to the Children's Advocate and asked for consultation. They asked for help: can you look at our policies and make sure that they support and affirm transgender youth that they're dealing with in the Ministry of Corrections? That was the right thing to do. What happened in the Ministry of Education that they've decided to bring forward a policy without consulting with anybody?

We learned in Justice Megaw's ruling last night that there was no evidence, no evidence that parents were consulted, school divisions were consulted, teachers were consulted. None of that happened. Somehow the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety is getting it right, consulting with the Children's Advocate, ensuring that human rights are respected, but the Ministry of Education is getting it wrong.

What is happening over there? What's happening on the other side that they can talk about inclusion and support for transgender youth in Corrections and Policing, but not in our classrooms? Not in our classrooms. Are they waiting? Are they waiting for these youth to be kicked out of home? Are they waiting for these youth to be in such difficult situations in life that they end up being dealt with in Corrections and Policing, and then they'll find the support and the consultation that they need? I mean, this is backwards thinking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they're going to get it right in Corrections and stop that conversation from happening in Education. It's unbelievable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, continuing on at the bottom of page 16 for those who've done the reading or would like to follow along with me today. It's looking at the human rights code:

It states that decisions regarding the identification of a person's gender are to be made between ministry staff and the offender, and that the primary consideration for identifying a transgender individual is self-identification. The policy does not indicate that for youth, these decisions may also include the offender's guardians and others where appropriate, but that the youth shall be consulted as to whom they wish to include in the decision-making process. The policy does not set a limitation on the ability of a youth to self-identify their gender identity based on their age, and therefore could apply to any young people age 12 and over who may be admitted to a correctional facility.

In contrast to the Ministry of Education's policy, there is discretion afforded to correctional staff as to when the

inclusion of their parents and guardians would be appropriate.

So again we see two very different approaches between Corrections and Education policy. In Corrections, there's discretion afforded to correctional staff as to when to include parents. This is not — I want to be very clear — this is not about keeping parents in the dark. It is not about keeping secrets from those parents. It is about having discretion about when is the best time for that to happen and supporting a young person through this process.

It is not about keeping secrets. And if it were, then I would simply have to ask, why does the Ministry of Corrections still have this policy? If they're so worried about keeping parents in the dark, why do they have a Ministry of Social Services and a Ministry of Corrections that still allow that process to be done thoughtfully, carefully, with advice from the Children's Advocate, with advice from professionals, with consultation, with a process that supports the child?

I mean this is incredible that they've chosen a path where Education will be less thoughtful than Corrections when coming to supporting gender-diverse, nonbinary, and trans youth. It's absolutely unbelievable, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We move on several pages. Page 20, the Children's Advocate considers under the subheading "Can this discrimination be justified?" A quote from page 20:

Although the Saskatchewan government's stated intent is to support the accommodation of transgender and gender-diverse youth while increasing parental inclusion, the onus is on the government to provide evidence that the policy will actually accomplish this goal.

[10:00]

Now this is an important flag from the Children's Advocate. And I'll remind the Assembly that this report from our independent Advocate for Children and Youth, an independent officer of this legislature, this was delivered before the court injunction. But she points something out that's very important, that the onus is on the government.

So the government talks in the bill and in the policy of a stated intent and the Children's Advocate says, well prove it. Prove it. You've got to prove that that intent is what's going to happen. The onus is on the government to provide evidence that the policy will actually accomplish the goal.

This government and their legal team at the Ministry of Justice had the opportunity to present that evidence in a Court of King's Bench and they could not do it. So following this report from the Children's Advocate, we had a court decision. And again, Justice Megaw . . . We've spent about two hours going through it. I still have copies if anyone is curious enough to want to read it. I encourage everyone to read it.

An Hon. Member: — We've got the internet. It's a new invention.

Mr. Love: — I'm glad to hear that the member from Saskatoon

Southeast is aware of the internet. It's a marvellous thing. It's a marvellous thing, but I saved you several steps. I've brought it here for you today. I brought it here for you today. Sometimes printers malfunction. I brought a copy for you, my friend. You can read it if you want to. And that's the question: do you want to? Do you want to?

I'll take a hand up. I'll take a nod. If you want to read it, I'll provide you a copy. If you come to work without doing the homework, then you won't understand what we're talking about in class today.

We're having a good time. While one member heckles at me, I'm having a good time with my colleague from Saskatoon Southeast on the question: do you want to know? If you want to know, I can assist you with a copy of the report.

I'm getting a little bit off track here due to the interaction that I'm getting from the other side, but I'm here for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Oh boy, I am a little off topic here.

So this is under the heading "Can this discrimination be justified?" Is this a justifiable action to infringe on the human rights of children for this policy? And that the onus is on the government. Justice Megaw says that there was no evidence, no evidence presented that the stated intent of this bill would be realized. There was no evidence that this bill and this policy will increase parental inclusion in schools, that it will meet the stated intent of the legislation. No evidence of that was presented in court.

And thus he imposed an injunction. But again Justice Megaw was very clear that that was not the end. He was not ruling on the constitutionality, was not making a judgment on what evidence could be presented, was simply imposing an injunction so that the courts could do their job, that this case would be heard in a court of appeal during the first semester of school and that an injunction was needed to prevent irreversible and irreparable harm to children.

So that's the process. That's the process. And the onus is on the government to provide evidence that this bill will meet its stated intent. They were not able to do that but they still have an opportunity to hold off on this legislation, to hold off on using the notwithstanding clause, to let our courts do their thing in support of a democratic process in Saskatchewan. They can still do that by voting no to this bill. They can still allow that process to play out.

On page 21, the advocate says:

In consultation with the advocate's Youth Advisory Council, one member stated that having her name and pronouns respected in school was very important to her because this is one of the most accessible ways to change without facing barriers related to money and health care access.

Before I read the quote from the member of the Youth Advisory Council, I know I mentioned this last night, the advocate is doing the work that the government refused to do. The advocate is consulting with the Youth Advisory Council, hearing the voices of those who will be impacted by this legislation and considering

those impacts in her report. That's work that this government should have done and they still have a chance to do that. The fact that they want to push this debate through in a number of days instead of the normal process.

And let's just pause there for a minute, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The normal process for a bill would allow public scrutiny for months. We would normally have months. Every member here knows this. What we're doing here today is completely abnormal in terms of the process and the rules that govern this Assembly. The reason I'm on my feet again today is not normal. We should be adjourning debate, and giving public and stakeholders and parents and all those concerned Saskatchewan people a chance to weigh in, to examine the bill. That's not happening here. But it still could. If this government wants to hear from youth who will be impacted, they can choose that. Everything that's happening here is a choice.

The advocate listened to youth, and again I applaud the advocate for having a Youth Advisory Council. I think youth voice is incredibly important. I've always been a champion of giving young people a voice, a collective voice in our society. That's kind of what I did for eight years.

I don't know if the members opposite know this. My students, when I was a teacher, my young grade 9 students wrote an opinion column that was published every week in the *StarPhoenix* and the *Leader-Post*. And we hosted a radio show every Monday night in Saskatoon at 6:30. Young people have important things to say. So that's what I did for eight years. I championed youth voice in our province. It was incredible to hear the things, the ideas that they brought forward.

Every Tuesday in class we would have kind of a pitch session where the students would share ideas about what would make a good radio show, what would make a good column. And they would work together in teams collaboratively to make that come together. Every Monday we would go downtown in Saskatoon. We'd have class downtown in Saskatoon at the school division office. And on Mondays, my students would record the show and a team of students would walk over. And it's really cool. They didn't hand in their work to me; they handed it in to the editor-in-chief at the *StarPhoenix*, who was just an incredible person. She would review their work with them, help them edit it, revise it, think about their writer's voice, think about their organization. Cut down the number of words, most likely.

You know, and the work that these students published was read by hundreds of thousands of people, not just in Saskatchewan. We had columns and work that was shared by organizations around the globe because people really care — I mean most people really care — what young people have to say. What young people have to say is important. I had student columns retweeted by all sorts of organizations like *The Globe and Mail*, organizations in Chicago, Toronto, LA [Los Angeles], all over North America and even beyond because people really showed an interest in reading what young people had to say.

And I didn't agree with every word that my students wrote. That wasn't the point. I wasn't there to censor what they had to say. The point is that youth voice is so incredibly important in our society. And I was so honoured to be able to teach that program and to help young people find that platform for their voice.

And so of course I'm going to highlight how significant it is for the Children's Advocate to listen to the words of youth, something that this government has failed to do. But again, they can decide today. They could decide right now to hit pause and to listen to the voices of young people in this province, listen to the voices of parents in this province, listen to the voices of grandparents, counsellors, psychologists, doctors. All of those people should be listened to, and they've been cut out.

But let's hear what this member of the advocate's Youth Advisory Council had to say:

Especially when it comes to the school atmosphere, knowing that if I want to change and not be misgendered, deadnamed, etc. at school, the knowledge that my parents would have to know that to be a possibility, that would change things. That would make me go through a lot more consideration because of the fear that if it goes badly, well then it's just not happening. It probably would have made me consider not wanting to bother at all because, like, that additional hurdle can make a lot of people struggling to come out who already are having a hard time of it. That could be one more thing discouraging them to come out at all.

Sorry, there's a little bit of an edit here because I think that this is transcribed orally so it's not a written exchange. It's something that's been transcribed from an oral exchange. I think it's saying:

If my parents disapproved, then I would have been stuck for years with every single teacher or employee of the school calling me the wrong name and the wrong pronouns. It's not a friendly environment. And it puts a lot of unfair pressure on teachers, where even if they know, they are forced to call these kids by the wrong name and pronouns and hurt them with that every time.

Now again these are the words of a youth in Saskatchewan who will be impacted. And as we examined in Justice Megaw's ruling from last night, this is a minority within a minority, a very small number who maybe don't know or maybe they question. They're just not certain if they have support at home. And so we learned last night that the evidence presented in court says that for those students, this isn't just about the question of home and family inclusion. Like that's not what this is all about. It's also a question about instilling barriers to learning in school.

So what I hear from this student's words is that being misgendered at school, being unable to be themselves at school, having teachers required to call them a name that they know doesn't fit, having their peers know that about them is a barrier to learning. It's a barrier to learning because we know that one of the ingredients needed for true learning is engagement, being engaged in the lesson, being engaged in the activity. Students engage in what they're doing in the classroom, outside the classroom on field trips, that that's kind of that key piece that helps students to really learn. I'm not talking about memorizing. I'm talking about learning, really learning, internalizing a lesson.

And one of the things needed for engagement is a sense of belonging. Where does a sense of belonging come from for our young people in classrooms? It comes from feeling that they are affirmed for who they are, that they have connections to their

peers, that they're connected to the caring adults in their school community. It comes from feeling that they can be who they are on their own terms when they're at school. And from the words of this member of the Youth Advisory Council, they clearly indicate that this policy will hurt that and create a barrier to learning.

Now we've talked about a lot on the mental health side of, you know, the supports that are clearly not there and the damage this will do. But we also need to think about all of those students who will be forced to sit in classrooms, not being respected for who they are and unable to learn because of that lack of respect. It's quite concerning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have a policy coming from the Ministry of Education that is knowingly preventing learning from happening.

It's an appalling thing to have a Minister of Education stand up and present a bill that he knows will create a barrier to learning and engagement for students in Saskatchewan. But again, this is all about choices, and that is a choice that he's made to stand in his place and present this bill. And all members opposite will have a choice that they'll have to make when they stand to either vote for or against this legislation.

On page 23 the Children's Advocate explores the accessibility of professional supports. Now we've seen this debated in this Assembly during question period. We heard the minister on radio last week say that he believes that there are ample supports for students.

[10:15]

I like believing good things too. I like believing that everything will be fine. I like to think of myself in most scenarios as a very optimistic person. But I also like to think of myself as a pragmatic person with beliefs that are based on evidence and in the realities that I face, people that I care about face, my constituents face. And the reality is, that belief that the minister holds is not supported by evidence. There's no evidence to support that belief.

We know that last year in Saskatchewan schools, we had 3,840 more students than we had the year before, yet we had 66 fewer teachers and two fewer counsellors. His belief that mental health supports and accessibility to those supports is ample, is not based on evidence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to quote from page 23 of the advocate's report on accessibility of professional supports:

As indicated earlier, it is positive that the provincial policy requires the provision of support to students to have what a student may perceive to be a difficult conversation with their parent/guardian and to navigate a family dynamic that may not be supportive of their gender identity.

That is positive. Supports should be there.

It is also positive that the policy explicitly states that this will not occur until the student is ready to do so. However the advocate is concerned that there are not sufficient professional supports available in schools to meet this additional demand.

That's where so much of our opposition to this policy really comes from. Operating on a belief that all the supports needed will be there, when we know that we have fewer than one counsellor for every 3,000 students in this province. School-based counsellors are run off their feet trying to meet the needs that are flying at them on a daily basis. To believe that they will somehow create time, energy, policies to provide these supports is a belief that's without merit and without evidence.

I'd like to read a quote from another Youth Advisory Council member. "With all of the cuts and everything, I'm, like, so where are these resources coming from? 'Cause I haven't seen them." That's what our youth have to say. That's what our youth have to say.

And if they wanted to know, they could find out. They could find out by picking up their copy today or by using the World Wide Web internet, the member from Southeast did note is available. And they didn't have to wait to come to work to get the reading package, but here we are. If they wanted to know what young people think, they could open up that report to page 23. Again the quote from the young person: "With all of the cuts and everything, I'm like, so where are these resources coming from? 'Cause I haven't seen them."

Further down on page 23, the advocate notes:

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation has been vocal about concerns with the increasing demands on teachers related to increasing class size and complexity. These circumstances raise questions as to whether teachers will be available to offer this support. Specifically in response to the release of this policy, the STF reported that the current staffing ratios in Saskatoon average one counsellor to every 3,000 students, stating, "We don't have support for students who are already struggling, and now we're going to have additional struggles in our school for some very vulnerable students."

I'll pause there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and note, had this government engaged in consultations before those nine days in August when this policy was developed after receiving seven emails, had they wanted to know, had they sat down at the table with school divisions, had they sat down with teachers, they would have found out the supports are not there. This policy will not work. It will not achieve the intent that's stated here. They would've had the chance to find that out, but they didn't do that. That was a choice by this government. They chose not to listen to those staffing our schools. They chose not to listen to those on the front lines.

In addition to not listening to parents, they've not listened to folks who work in schools day after day, and they see that students with complex needs are going unmet. Students in mental health crisis are not getting connected to the supports that they need. They could have found out all of these things had they been willing to listen, but without the willingness to listen, we've ended up with a policy like the legislation before us today in Bill 137.

The following paragraph states:

This statement reaffirms the lack of sufficient counsellors

and elders in schools as described by children and youth in the advocate's 2022 report entitled *Desperately Waiting*. In 2022 the Government of Saskatchewan accepted our recommendation to the education and health sectors to jointly increase the presence of mental health supports in schools, however, has updated our office that it will not begin working on implementation of this recommendation until 2026.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government has indicated that they will not begin working on implementing these recommendations until 2026. Pretty bold assumption that they're still going to be in government in 2026, okay, for one. But for two, how can they constantly bring forth a policy knowing that they won't even take action on providing mental health supports for another three years? What are these youth going to do for the next three years before they even start responding to the recommendations from the Advocate for Children and Youth in the *Desperately Waiting* report from 2022?

That's a three-year gap where they know, they've indicated in their own words, that they won't respond to that report. They won't have supports in place, the mental health resources that our youth need — our youth who are dying, dying by suicide at rates higher than anywhere else in the country, where suicide is the leading cause of death for Saskatchewan persons age 15 to 24. And they won't even start working on this recommendation until 2026.

I have no nice words. I have no kind words to describe the glaring gap in care for the children and youth of this province. I've got nothing nice to say about it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's absolutely appalling that they would leave those young people in limbo while they force through this policy that will drive mental health needs through the roof, while not responding to this report until 2026. It's absolutely disgusting.

The advocate continues under the heading of "Accessibility of professional supports" on page 24, and I'll quote from there:

Delays and potentially denials of the use of young people's preferred names and pronouns could create situations where they experience distress, thereby further increasing demand on an already overloaded and under-resourced support system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is exactly what we're talking about here today. A policy that will create even more stress on a system that's overloaded and under-resourced, where kids like Bee, whose mother Sarah sat in that gallery last week, fall through the cracks, fall through the cracks into addictions, into mental health crisis, and die by suicide. That is the result.

That is the worst-case scenario for this policy and it's a worst-case scenario that this government has shown no interest in even understanding, no interest in exploring, no interest in listening to parents, no interest in listening to mental health professionals, no interest in listening to the advocate, no interest in taking action on that 2022 report, *Desperately Waiting*. No interest in examining the consequences for young people in Saskatchewan. But this is it. It will increase the need for mental health services that simply aren't there for our young people today.

Carrying on, on page 24:

Given the implication of this policy directive on young people, at the very least it will be incumbent on the Ministry of Education to immediately increase the supports available to young people in schools, where they spend the majority of their time, such as by immediate implementation of the advocate's recommendation in this regard.

So the advocate's saying at the bare minimum our students need mental health supports in schools that align with the recommendation. At the bare minimum this government needs to recognize that this, this is an issue fitting of an emergency sitting — mental health supports for young people. That's what we should be debating today, so we no longer have a province where the leading cause of death for somebody who's 15 to 24 is suicide. That would be reason to call us all back, to spend all those taxpayer dollars, to have the Clerks sit here round the clock, Hansard around the clock, facilities, all the folks here, security, Sergeant-at-Arms — all of the work that's going into this building. If we were here to focus on ensuring that the leading cause of death for young people is not suicide, absolutely fitting reason for us to be here.

But that's not why we're here. That's not why we're here. We're here to talk about the divisive, cynical politics of the Sask Party government that brought forward a piece of legislation without talking to parents, without talking to teachers, without talking to mental health professionals, without talking to school divisions, without consulting anybody, without providing a shred of evidence in the court. And they're going to ram through this policy using the notwithstanding clause. That's why we're here. And I do think it's a shame.

The next subheading here in the advocate's report looks at a couple, I think, interesting things that we need to consider with this legislation as well, that being the education and social work codes of ethics. The advocate notes and I quote, "The Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board standards of conduct require that registered teachers . . ." And just pause there for a minute. The SPTRB [Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board] is in place to regulate teachers as an outside body. We hopefully all know the history of that as something undertaken by this government. They've supported the work of the SPTRB to regulate the profession. They've supported removing that from the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation]. That was all done under this government. So in essence they've designed this system that we have today. This is all under their design.

Well here are the standards of conduct that are required of professional teachers, noted by the advocate:

base their relationships with learners on mutual trust and respect by honouring individual identity and circumstance without prejudice;

have regard for the safety and academic, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of learners by taking measures to provide and model a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment at school;

act with honesty and integrity by communicating openly,

truthfully, and respectfully with all relevant parties while maintaining necessary confidentiality;

uphold public trust and confidence in the education profession by maintaining appropriate communication and professional relationships with learners, parents, guardians, colleagues, and other stakeholders.

Under these standards, registered teachers can be disciplined for misconduct, for “any intentional act or omission designed to humiliate or cause distress or loss of dignity to any person in school or out of school, which may include verbal or non-verbal behaviour.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the professional code of conduct that governs professional teachers in our province, professional teachers who serve this province so incredibly well, professional teachers who work hard to drive that teaching and learning that happens in schools. I hope that that’s important to all of us, while we’ve seen billboards from this Sask Party government devaluing the role of teachers in our province, trying to sell a message to the public that these folks are somehow overpaid and underworked. I mean, it’s a bunch of nonsense, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I taught for 10 years with two degrees. I spent over seven years in university before I became a teacher, and I never made \$92,000 a year.

[10:30]

And here they are carrying out this billboard campaign to devalue the role that teachers play. You know, we have teachers with the professional standards of conduct that I think merit a lot of discussion around Bill 137.

Let’s pause and think about this for a few minutes. How could a teacher maintain these aspects of the standards of conduct if this legislation is implemented by this Assembly? How could a teacher honour individual identity and circumstance without prejudice if they’re required to knowingly misgender a student in their classroom? This is important for us to consider. And I think that this government and the minister had a chance to consider these things if they would have consulted before creating this legislation. All of this could have been avoided if they would have sat down and worked co-operatively.

I don’t think I ever used this comment on any of my report cards when I taught high school, but it comes back to that old report card comment that says, “does not work well with others.” And that kind of perfectly describes . . . [inaudible] . . . does not work well with others. You know? Are they willing to sit down and do some group work with parents? Not in this policy. They haven’t done it. There’s no evidence of that. Are they willing to sit down and do some group work with school boards? Not in this policy. There’s no evidence of that. Are they willing to sit down and do some group work with the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board, who has standards of conduct for teachers? There’s no evidence that they’re willing to work well with others.

So we have a policy that appears to put these standards of conduct for our professional teachers in jeopardy. Those standards include, again, to act with honesty and integrity by communicating openly, truthfully, and respectfully with all relevant parties; and to uphold public trust and confidence in the

education profession by maintaining appropriate communication and professional relationships with learners, parents, guardians, colleagues, and stakeholders.

Isn’t that incumbent on this government to also maintain those relationships with young people? They haven’t listened to them. Parents? They haven’t listened to them. Guardians? Not at all. Colleagues? No, not on this side. And other stakeholders? They haven’t listened to any stakeholders in drafting this.

Yet teachers are expected to do that every day when they arrive to school. And they don’t think that they need to . . . They don’t need to uphold that, you know, on that side. I’d like to see a standard of conduct maybe that would require members here to engage in the kind of thoughtful process that teachers are required to do.

But I should pause here and point out, appropriate communication with parents. This is a requirement for teachers. I don’t know if any members opposite have seen the . . . I saw it once. It made me laugh. It was maybe on Instagram. There was a meme or something — maybe it was a tweet — and it said, I’m going to need to resign from my full-time job so I have enough time to read all the emails from my kid’s teacher. Something like that.

And I don’t know for the members opposite who have children in school . . . I’ve got three. I get more communication from my kids’ teachers than I can handle on most days. I get more . . . And it’s fantastic. I appreciate it. That goes for my daughter in grade 11, my son in grade 5, and my youngest in grade 1. I get so much helpful, thoughtful communication from those teachers, whether that’s . . . usually through Edsby. You know, everyone loves Edsby. I get emails. I get to visit with them when I’m there to pick up my kids. I get that face-to-face contact at parent-teacher, three-way conferences.

I know that any day of the week, I can contact any of those teachers and they’ll get back to me. Teachers are great at this. Teachers are great at communicating with home. I am overwhelmed on most days by the level of communication, including the school principal where my boys go to school. He’s just fantastic at communicating with parents, upholding his professional standard of conduct, making sure that parents are informed on everything that happens.

I hope that the members opposite, who have supported the government throwing up these billboards with some pretty unbelievable information, are saying thank you to their children’s teachers for the communication that they engage in, if not every day, at least most days. I hear from my kids’ teachers on most days, and I know that they work really hard to do that. It takes a lot of work to keep those lines of communication open, but we know that teachers are committed to that.

The advocate goes on, on page 25:

It is noted that the SPTRB standards in particular refer to appropriate communication with parents/guardians. However as it has already been determined that refusing to honour a mature student’s preferred name and pronouns in the absence of parental/guardian consent is discriminatory, necessitating this refusal may require teachers to violate

their own professional standards of conduct in addition to human rights law.

So the advocate's pretty clear that these professional standards developed under this government — that are there to govern the professional work of teachers in this province — will be required to be broken by this policy.

This begs the question, well what will teachers do? And I think, you know, it's a great question for the minister if he can answer it. How can he expect teachers to carry out a policy that doesn't align with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation code of professional ethics, doesn't align with the SPTRB professional conduct for teachers, and doesn't align with the human rights code?

Now they're going to use the notwithstanding clause in this legislation to override the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to override *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*. It's absolutely the wrong approach. But what are they going to do about these professional codes of conduct? That hasn't been addressed in legislation. Are they going to somehow override that? Are they going to unilaterally, without consultation, tell teachers to change how they conduct themselves in our schools? I guess it's a wait-and-see.

Further on page 25:

Mental health counsellors employed in Saskatchewan schools are often social workers and are bound by the SASW standards of practice. Under the policy these professionals would also be required to misgender students under age 16 if they did not have parental/guardian consent for the use of their preferred name and pronouns. This dynamic would likely interfere with the efficacy of counselling to that student.

I mean this, again the advocate's pointing out something that likely didn't show up on the radar of this government for one reason: they don't work well with others. Refusal to work with social workers, refusal to work with teachers, refusal to examine the professional code of conduct that governs those professions. These are things that this government should have known when they brought forth this legislation. They could have known if they read this report that came out weeks ago.

But they showed up to work yesterday and no one's indicated that they've read the report. I'll remind the members opposite I've got 47 copies with me today and I'll be happy to distribute those at 11:01 this evening.

There's another quote here from the advocate's Youth Advisory Council member: "The counsellor's office should ultimately be a safe place where it, kind of, does not abide by the rules."

Now I think that what this youth is saying is that when a youth goes into the counsellor's office, they want to be able to talk about things that they maybe can't talk about in other places in the school. The counsellor's office is an important place for many young people in our schools. And when they go there, they want to be able to kind of talk freely about what they're experiencing in school. That's how I interpret what that youth is bringing to the discussion.

But this legislation will require all school staff to follow the policy — those governed by the SPTRB standards of conduct that contravene this policy and those governed by the social workers' SASW [Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers] standards of practice. This policy lacks thoughtfulness, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It lacks thoughtfulness as a result of zero consultation taking place — nine days in August, seven emails that can't even be confirmed that they're from Saskatchewan people or parents of school-aged children. They developed a policy without sitting down at a table with professional teachers, with social workers who provide those vital counselling services in our schools.

Towards the end of the report here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the advocate provides some recommendations. Now let me be clear that we are against this policy on this side of the Assembly. We think it has been created without the consultation that happens with really every other piece of legislation that we see in the Assembly, giving parents only days to look at the actual legislation instead of weeks and months; giving school divisions days to look at the legislation instead of weeks and months; giving mental health professionals, those providing support to our young people in time of crisis, giving them days to look at this legislation instead of weeks and months. We're against this policy.

But the Children's Advocate has offered a few recommendations, and I would like to offer those in her words verbatim from the report. On page 26, recommendation 1:

The Ministry of Education amend the *Use of Preferred First Names and Pronouns by Students* policy to:

recognize the right of all individuals to gender identity and expression;

provide a definition of gender expression to ensure consistency in understandings across the province;

respect decisions of students around their gender identity and expression, including the use of their preferred names, pronouns, based on demonstrated capacity rather than age;

offer continued and ongoing support to students that involves their parent/guardian in these matters whenever possible and appropriate, but not against the wishes of a student with capacity;

include the requirement to investigate complaints of misgendering in the policy, rather than only in the sample administrative procedure, to ensure consistency across the province.

Now before I move on to recommendation 2, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government had a chance to review these recommendations, recommendations that were created by listening to Saskatchewan families, listening to young people, looking at our human rights code, looking at the work of the advocate for children and youth in New Brunswick, looking at the work of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, looking at all of those important voices that have insights to offer to this discussion.

She did the work that the government refused to do. She's essentially handing them her work saying, here are some recommendations that, if you must go through with this policy, can improve it.

None of this showed up in Bill 137. None of this is represented. There is no indication that this government at any point was welcoming of the involvement from our independent Advocate for Children and Youth in this province. What a shame. Unwilling to listen to that independent voice that's here to stand up for the rights of children and youth in Saskatchewan. Cutting her out completely. What an absolute shame.

Recommendation 2 from the advocate's findings, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

The Ministry of Education develop and implement a concrete plan to increase the capacity of schools to provide professional student supports to facilitate parental inclusion regarding matters related to gender identity when appropriate and in the best interests of the child. This may include immediate implementation of the advocate's recommendations in *Desperately Waiting* from 2022 to increase the presence of mental health counsellors and elders in schools, and to adopt a consistent approach to consent for children and youth to receive mental health counselling based on the evolving capacities of the child rather than age.

The advocate has advised the Ministry of Education that our office would be pleased to provide consultation and support in revising this policy to ensure the rights and best interests of children in Saskatchewan continue to guide the important work being done by Saskatchewan teachers and schools.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I think is an important point to conclude on for this report.

[10:45]

The advocate has offered her full support to this government. She's indicated her office would be pleased to provide consultation and support in revising this policy. This is an offer of help not just for this government; it's an offer of help for the children and youth of Saskatchewan. I cannot accept that this government has refused to take that help. That is an unacceptable position by the Minister of Education to refuse the help of the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth.

I began this report by reading the advocate's mandate in our province — a mandate that comes from this legislature — to stand up for the rights of children and youth in Saskatchewan. The fact that that mandate had been ignored by this government, her offer to consult and provide help has been ignored, tells you all you need to know about their real intentions. Is there any intention to create a policy that actually includes and supports youth? There was no evidence provided in court, and they're not taking help from the Children's Advocate. I think we get to see plainly exactly what their aims are with this. It has nothing to do about supporting young people in Saskatchewan. If it did, they would take these recommendations. They would invite the advocate in. They would scrap this bill and get back to work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would implore members opposite to read this report. I do have copies with me today if they would like one. They don't need to print it out; I've got it for them. Because there's a number of items in the appendix to this report that go into even more detail than I've shared here today and last night on the advocate's report. I think it's an incredibly important document. To disregard it I think is dangerous. I think it's lacking in ethics to disregard a report from the Children's Advocate on the policy and the legislation that has come out of that policy. I think it's the wrong approach, and I can't say it any more clearly. I implore members opposite to read the report, to scrap this bill, to sit down with the Children's Advocate, and find a way forward.

I said last night, and I stand by these words again today: we don't need to do it this way. There is a path forward here where parental engagement, parental inclusion — and those are different things — where parental engagement and the voice of parents can be improved and enhanced in our education system. There's a path forward. It does not need to include trampling on the rights of already-vulnerable kids to achieve that outcome. That's a choice that they're making.

It's a political choice. I think it's a political gamble that they're making. I don't think it's a wise one, not that they'll ever listen to me. But it's very much a choice that they're making to wage those rights as if they're competing. There's no scarcity here. We can include parents. We must include parents. That's important. We've agreed on that. It's so nice when we agree in this Assembly. We agree on the important role of parents in education. We agree on that fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That path that they're choosing is a choice, and it's theirs alone. They can force this legislation through if they want to — and it appears as though they will — without listening to parents, without listening to teachers, without listening to mental health professionals, without listening to youth themselves. They will force this through, and they don't have to. They can change course today if they'd like to.

I've got to check my notes here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I continue on to a different segment of my remarks today. I've got some notes here somewhere . . . Ah, thanks. I'm feeling good. I'm feeling good.

You know, I think, why don't we take a few minutes to look at the legislation itself? So I've got a copy of Bill 137 in front of me here, and there's a few things that I'd like to pull out from the legislation itself in my remarks today.

I'm going to start with an interesting one. And I'll tell you, this one caught a lot of folks off guard that this would be buried in a bill, you know, in a bill entitled *An Act to amend The Education Act, 1995 respecting parental rights*. Okay, that's the title. But we have subsection 184:

. . . **is amended by adding** “and the flag of Saskatchewan” **after** “flag of Canada”.

So this is really interesting. Now I love the flag of Saskatchewan. It's the best flag. There's no flag better than the flag of Saskatchewan. It's the best of all provinces. Can we agree? Great. That's great. Would I love to see it flying outside of every

Saskatchewan school? Yeah, that would be great. Why is that written into this legislation? Where every school already has the flag of Canada, to add a second flagpole is a really interesting thing to add in here. Why a second flagpole, and why does that have to be dealt with in legislation?

I mean I'm not against it. I mean I'm kind of concerned about the process here when no one was consulted. Because at the end of the day, for schools that don't already have two flagpoles, this is an added cost. What supports will there be for school divisions to add a second flagpole and to maintain that flagpole and to purchase flags, you know, which get weathered and tattered? And we don't want them looking that way, so they're going to have to renew them every, you know, maybe every few months. I don't know the schedule for renewing flags, how often you need to do that. Anyone, any experts? No? Without seeing any, it just seems like a really odd thing.

And then to legislate that in and put that cost on divisions. These are divisions that describe the situation as being cut to the bone. Cut to the bone. And we're talking about schools that don't have — clearly, despite what the minister believes — don't have ample mental health supports for our young people, and now we are requiring them to install a second flagpole.

Every dollar the divisions must spend on an extra flagpole, which I'm told can cost up to \$50,000, is a dollar that won't be there for student supports, okay, that won't be there to provide supports for students. So to write this into these amendments on parental rights, it strikes me as odd. It strikes me as misplaced priorities.

I mean again I love the Saskatchewan flag. No one here is . . . It's a beautiful flag. Love to see it outside a school where my kids go or maybe where I'll teach someday. No problem with that. But the cost to divisions is one . . . Because they didn't consult anybody with this bill, it's just I think misplaced priorities. And instructing divisions that they're required to have that, I think comes back to that point of not working well with others.

Looking further down in the legislation, under the section on parents and guardians and the rights of parents and guardians, following the definitions of "pupils" and "schools" that they're changing, we look at the rights of parents and guardians. Quote, this is section 197.2:

Subject to the other provisions of this Act and to the regulations, a parent or guardian of a pupil has the right to:

(a) act as the primary decision-maker with respect to the pupil's education;

That's already happening. When you talk to educators, this is already happening. This is what happens in schools.

(b) be informed on a regular basis of the pupil's attendance, behaviour and academic achievement in school;

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I already talked about the number of emails that I receive from my children's teachers on a daily basis — if not daily, then most days — if my kids or if any of our kids don't attend school. Schools are absolutely already doing a fantastic job of keeping parents informed on matters of attendance. I know

that when I was a teacher, we spent countless hours in staff meetings discussing what we can do to both encourage better attendance especially for those learners who were sometimes struggling in attendance. It's such an important part of that. You've really got to be there. You know, attendance is such an important part.

And a key part of that is absolutely communicating with parents, getting that co-operation, that engagement of the home and the school and the community to support the learner. That's absolutely vital. And attendance is at the core of that. That's already happening in every school in this province. Schools are already informing families, parents and guardians on matters of attendance. I don't know what else I can say. That's what is happening today. And this bill isn't in force yet. It's happening right now.

(c) consult with the pupil's teachers and other employees of the school with respect to the pupil's courses of study and academic achievement;

Absolutely. Yes, we want parents involved. We all agree on that parental engagement, consulting with teachers and other employees of the school on the course of study, and how they . . . Yeah, 100 per cent.

(d) have access to the pupil's school file;

Already happening.

(e) receive information respecting the courses of study available to the pupil, including online learning, and to make decisions as to which courses of study the pupil enrolls in;

I mean so much of this is already happening in schools, and to me what it comes down to is just a real lack of understanding of what schools look like in Saskatchewan in 2023. If this brand new minister who has never spent a day in a Saskatchewan school doesn't know that these things are happening, then my advice to him would be get with the program. You know, maybe learn a little bit about your file so you know what schools actually look like and the work that they're doing.

Because the word that I hear back, the word that I'm hearing back from stakeholders in education is that so much of this is really seen as disrespectful — disrespectful of the work that divisions, school-based administrators, teachers are already doing. It's really being taken as a slap in the face because schools are great at these things that I've already listed here.

(f) be informed of the code of conduct and administrative policies, including discipline and behaviour management policies, of the school;

Already happening.

(g) be informed pursuant to sections 153 and 154 of any disciplinary action or investigation taken by the school in relation to the pupil's conduct;

Already happening.

(h) if the pupil has been expelled from school, request a review and reconsideration of the expulsion in accordance with subsection 155(3) after the expiration of one year;

School divisions are already developing policies on all these things based on their roles in their communities with locally elected boards, with effective local voice to develop local administrative procedures that govern all of these things. Again, the education stakeholders I talked to see this as a disrespectful move by the government and a sign that they don't actually know what schools look like and the work that they're currently doing in 2023.

You know, like that's the refrain the whole way down. It's really odd to see some of these things that are written into this policy. But I think that when we get to the reason for this legislation coming before us, here it is, down in section (m):

(m) if sexual health content is being presented to pupils in the school:

(i) at least 2 weeks before the sexual health content is presented to pupils, be informed by the principal of:

(A) the subject matter of the sexual health content; and

(B) the dates on which the . . . content is to be presented . . .

(ii) if the parent or guardian so chooses, withdraw the pupil from the presentation of the sexual health content by giving written notice to the principal;

This is already happening. Parents already have that ability in our province. This is a bit of a dog whistle to folks who are really concerned about this. It's already happening. Schools are fantastic at communicating to parents about what's being taught. I get updates on what's being taught in math class. I get updates on what's being taught, what English lesson they're working on. My son's working on a personal narrative writing assignment for the next week, and I went through the rubric with him two nights ago, a rubric that was delivered to me through Edsby by his classroom teacher.

So we are already . . . All of these things are already happening, especially when it comes to those sensitive issues like sex health education. That communication is already happening. And again, this is being taken by educators as a lack of recognition of how hard they're working to keep parents in the loop.

[11:00]

And then we get to section (n):

(n) in accordance with section 197.4, if the pupil is under 16 years of age, provide consent before the pupil's teachers and other employees of the school use the pupil's new gender-related preferred name or gender identity at school; and

(o) be a member . . .

Oh, I'll get to that after. I'll pause there.

I mean, this is what we're talking about. All of this other stuff that again lacks recognition of the work being done in schools makes it seem like somehow these are new expectations that parents can have. They're already happening. But this is the real reason for bringing this bill forward.

I've canvassed this thoroughly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This government clearly understands, through invoking the notwithstanding clause, clearly understands that this will break, will trample on a young person's human rights in Saskatchewan, will trample on their Charter rights. They're invoking the notwithstanding clause to put in this clause that parents have the right:

. . . if the pupil is under 16 years of age, provide consent before the pupil's teachers and other employees of the school use . . . [their] new gender-related name [or pronoun] or gender identity . . ."

It doesn't use the word "pronoun." That's clearly missing.

I'll get back to that later. I mean, again the disappointing part here for me is that this government has included this without listening to the recommendations from the Advocate for Children and Youth who offered all of her homework to a government that hasn't done their homework, offered those recommendations, offered suggestions, offered consultation. And that was ignored. They've ignored a Justice, an independent court and the value that the courts play in upholding balance in our democracy, protecting the people of this province from a government who wants to trample on their rights. And they've ignored that. They've ignored that ruling.

I don't know if I have much more to say about this, other than implore members opposite before they vote to do their homework, to read the judge's ruling, to read the advocate's report, to listen to the voices of parents that we will be bringing forward throughout this debate throughout this week, to listen to the voices of stakeholders, to listen to the voices of mental health experts, and — very importantly — to listen to the voices of children and youth who talk about what this clause will do because of what the judge called irreversible and irreparable harm to children and youth.

Now the final clause here under the parental rights, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is:

(o) be a member of the school community council or the conseil d'école, as the case may be, of the school.

This is an interesting one for me that the government included this here, because parents already have that right. Parents are always welcome to join their school community councils, which are legislated in *The Education Act*. And all of our 625 public and separate schools and CÉF [Conseil des écoles francsaskoises] schools have an SCC [school community council], a functioning SCC. That's the right place, not . . . one of the right places where parents can and should be involved for their voices to be heard. And I'll be making more comments on my vision and I think what could be done to make SCCs more effective.

Before I get to that, I'd like to take a quick look at the state of education in Saskatchewan today. And I think it's important to examine this in relation to this bill. Because if we look at the real concerns that parents have brought forward to this government, have brought forward to school divisions, have brought forward to their locally elected boards of education, to their trustees, I think that we get a glimpse on why this bill misses the mark on what's really important in our schools today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've reminded this Assembly many times that last week on Tuesday morning, I stood outside a school in Saskatoon, where the week prior students were not able to attend. The week prior, two daycare rooms were closed. To my knowledge the library in that school is still closed.

Those children, who have a right to education, were not able to receive that education for parts of the week prior because of a hole in the roof, a hole in the roof and a cascading waterfall that poured down through the second floor, through their library, all the way down to the basement where the daycare rooms were destroyed.

Now I hear some chatter opposite. Well it was the contractors, the contractors. Yeah, there was work being done on the school. And that member opposite who's chirping at me right now was there, staring up at a gaping hole in the ceiling, staring up at the tarps hanging from the ceiling directing rainwater into buckets. He saw the rotted walls in the school. He saw the unusable lockers. He saw the classrooms that were crammed, as that school's well over capacity. He saw the storage rooms being used as counselling rooms. He saw the gym that isn't big enough to provide for the needs of physical education in the school. He saw the second floor that was so hot at 10:30 in the morning that many of the students were struggling to focus.

He saw all of these things, and that member knows that for 10 years this school community has been advocating for a new building. And how many years away will that new building be while water pours down through the roof? How many years away is that new building while they get no help from this provincial government on the things that matter most to parents — having a safe roof over the heads of their young people when they go to school.

And here we are, talking about what kids call themselves on the playground. Here we are. That's the priorities of that minister and that government. Let's get to work on division. Let's get to work on farming as much rage and anger as we can without actually sitting down to listen to parents and their very real concerns, which start with putting a roof over the head of our kids. They know this full well. They know what they're doing with this divisive path.

Well the real state of education in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a record that they don't want to talk about. Now there's a saying in politics: when things aren't going well, you change the channel and turn up the volume. And that's what they're doing here to distract not only from their record in health care — health care where we had nearly 100 people in Saskatoon yesterday who had been admitted to the hospital but there was no bed for them to go to between our hospitals in Saskatoon. That's nearly 100 people. Talking about all the seniors waiting in health care, waiting in hospitals for a bed in long-term care. Dozens,

dozens if not hundreds, waiting for a place in long-term care while this government let 62 perfectly good beds go to waste at the Regina Lutheran care home.

They're changing the channel. They don't want to talk about their record. Well I'm here to talk about their record and why this bill is misplaced priorities just in education. If all we look at is education, we clearly see that they are not hitting the mark.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2012-2013 this government introduced a new funding formula for schools. Since that time the average funding per student, not including capital spending, has increased less than 4 per cent, less than 4 per cent since 2012-2013, if you take out capital funding.

Now let's think about in the last 10 years what the increase in costs have been for our school divisions. They get operating grants from the government. That's their only source of funding, for operating grants. That needs to pay for things like utilities. They've got to pay for things like busing, fuel. They've got to pay for salaries. They've got to pay for resources. They've got to pay for the needs in their school communities and their divisions, to do the best job that they can to meet the needs of the children who show up.

They don't get to turn away students with needs, like many of our independent schools do in this province when a child shows up with complex medical needs. I've got children like this in my community in Saskatoon Eastview who arrive at the doors of the school with incredibly complex medical and learning needs, and our school divisions courageously do whatever they can to meet those needs.

But those costs over the last 10 years have done nothing but increase. Mr. Deputy Speaker, none of us can think of a year when the costs of those things have gone down. In the last decade the cost of everything has risen, so it's no wonder that teachers are raising the alarm of education funding that has not kept pace with inflation. School divisions have raised the alarm of education funding that has not kept pace with inflation.

But this tired and out-of-touch government has done nothing but rely on decades-old talking points about record funding in Education. It's always record funding. Every year is record funding. That's how inflation works. Our salaries are record salaries in the province of Saskatchewan. Our salaries that are tied to that increased consumer price index, our salaries are record high every year. We, of anyone in this province, should be able to recognize the rising cost of living and the rising cost of expenditures for school divisions, but somehow this Sask Party government is unable or unwilling to recognize all of those rising costs for school divisions.

And instead of getting to work on the things that matter, they've gotten to work sowing division in this province, refusing to listen to parents, refusing to listen to teachers, refusing to listen to mental health experts, and to go down a path of division. I advise that government to get back to work on the things that matter, the things that matter to our families, the things that matter to our children, the things that matter to our teachers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this amounts to chronic underfunding over the last 10 years. A couple weeks ago, a few weeks back we

finally got an education sector staffing profile. It was nearly one year overdue. There's no explanation for why this document which is published every year by the government . . . It offers a look at five years of staffing in the education sector. There is no reason why that document should have been nearly one year overdue from being published by this out-of-touch government. The only conceivable reason, the only conceivable reason is that the numbers included in it make them look bad. And they sure do. They sure do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

After being nearly a year late, it shows that the number of school-based educators is now 11,567.1. That's how many teachers are working in our schools in Saskatchewan. That number is lower than it's been the last four years.

Now this government has said many times, the former minister of Education has said many times that that's partially due to increased staffing that came with some federal supports for COVID. That's not completely wrong. There were some increased staffing during the pandemic in schools that saw those numbers go up maybe artificially. But I'll tell you what. That argument holds absolutely no water when we look at the year 2018-2019. That was before the pandemic, a full school year before. So these numbers have nothing to do with pandemic learning and increased supports.

In 2018-2019 there were 11,724.7 school-based educators. That was before COVID, and today there are 157.6 fewer teachers working in schools compared to that year — 157 fewer teachers serving our young people compared to five years ago.

Now if we look further back, if we look back to the year after the new funding formula came in, in 2013-2014, well that's how far back we'll have to go to find a year that had an equal number of teachers as last year — 2013. 2013 to find the same number of teachers in that year as what we currently have.

How many more students? How many more students is the question. In 2022-23 we had 189,924 students, 189,000, and I'll add — and I'll get to this in a moment — thousands more coming through our doors this school year. Some of those enrolment numbers are starting to come in, and I would actually challenge the Education minister and this government to put out those numbers. Let's publish those September enrolment numbers. They have the numbers. They know the numbers. They're usually out by this time of year.

[11:15]

So I challenge that minister and this government, let's release the September enrolment numbers from this school year so we know how many more students are in our schools and how many fewer supports are present. Let's get those numbers out today.

In 2022-23 the number again was 189,924 students. In 2013-14, a year with a comparable number of teachers in the building, we had 170,582. We're good at math on this side. That's 19,342 more students. That's 19,342 more students last school year than about eight years, nine years previous.

Now this is a government that likes to claim that we've got one teacher for every 19 students in the province. If that were true, we would have 1,000 more teachers today than we had in

2013-14. We'd have 1,000 more teachers. The fact is, we don't. We don't have a single, we don't have any more teachers than we had that year. Not a single new teacher with 19,000 new students.

Does this amount to ample support for our young people that this minister claims? He's got no evidence to stand on his feet and make those claims in this Assembly, in that rotunda, or on the airwaves in this province. He's got no credibility to spread that message. Nineteen thousand more students and no new teachers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to examine who are these new students, those 19,000 new students in our buildings. And we need to examine how are they being served by a government that's focused on a path of division, of bringing forward legislation that is focused on dividing the people of Saskatchewan instead of focusing on the real issues in our schools, which comes down to funding and providing supports for students who need them.

So we know that the largest demographic making up these new students are students who are new to Canada. We have a lot of newcomer students in our school system. Unfortunately, since 2012-2013, the number of English as a second language teachers has decreased. It has not gone up. While we have 19,000 new students, thousands of them new to Canada and new to English, we actually have fewer teachers teaching EAL [English as an additional language] in our schools today.

Now it's hard to imagine with the diversity that we see in our schools. And again we have a minister who's never spent a day in a school. If he had been in a school in a professional capacity of any kind, he would see that our schools today are more diverse than they've ever been. They're diverse with students with a variety of learning needs, but learning English is a big one. And for the future of our province, I can't imagine any good reason why this isn't a priority for this Premier and this Sask Party government, supporting those students who are new to Canada who eagerly want to learn English and have every chance at success in our great province. But that is not a priority for this government, and the numbers prove it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, looking further at some of the other cuts to services for children in our province, we see that there's a number of other areas in that sector staffing profile that have seen reductions over the years, especially since that funding formula changed just over 10 years ago.

We see that teacher-librarians are down by 80 per cent. In my city in Saskatoon, I'm aware that in Saskatoon Public Schools at the collegiate level, there is now for all collegiates in the city one librarian. One. And for 44 elementary schools, there are two. Two librarians serving the largest school division in the province. Forty-four elementary schools and two librarians. Now we've known for a long time that this government doesn't support the work of libraries, but they don't even support the work of libraries within our public and separate school systems.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've seen that since that funding formula change, there's been a reduction in school counsellors by 30 per cent. Does this amount to ample supports for students experiencing mental health crises? It's hard to imagine. It's hard to imagine going down this path of division, but you can imagine

it when you realize that the point is distraction. Change the channel; turn up the volume. Let's make folks angry about something that we cannot point to a single instance of it ever happening in our province. We can't produce a single person, a single shred of evidence in a court that proves that this is a serious issue. We can't even produce evidence in court.

But let's make everyone as angry as possible over something that's never happened, to distract from the fact that we've lost 80 per cent of our teacher-librarians, 30 per cent of our in-school counsellors. And psychologists in our schools, they're down too, 20 per cent under this government.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't just have to read numbers for this. I saw the impacts of these cuts with my own eyes. I taught in Saskatoon Eastview for 10 years, did my internship there, moved on to a different school for a one-year temporary contract and then was lucky to come back. Came back at first on a .75. 0.75 per cent of \$60,000 a year. You can do the math on how much I was bringing home to support my family. But you know, it clearly wasn't what their billboards state. Because 0.75 of 60,000 is how much? It's about \$45,000 a year. That's how much I made.

But I saw from my experience working as a teacher in Saskatoon Public Schools for a decade, I saw the impact of successive years of cuts after cuts after cuts. And it absolutely aligns with these numbers that I've shared here today.

Now I also need to be honest and truthful. I loved teaching; I miss teaching. I think the most common question I get from folks I see around the community who know I went from the classroom to, you know, here: do you miss teaching? Of course I do. I loved it. Loved working with young people, loved working with their families, loved working with my colleagues in support of that great vision of public education that we hold on this side. It was an incredible opportunity that I had, to teach the way I did with the students and the families that I got to work with.

In most cases, my classroom was doing okay. We were doing okay. I did have many years where I had students in need of EA [educational assistant] support and it was not available. That happened. I had students in need of English language learning supports. That was hard to come by. But what I did have was incredibly dedicated colleagues, including a half-time EAL teacher who always opened her door before school, during breaks, and during lunch hour, things she was never required to do but she did anyway in service to those EAL learners in our school.

I've worked with incredible resource teachers over the years, who would always open the resource room at lunch, before school, after school, going above and beyond to support students who weren't getting the help that they needed during class time because those supports were not available.

Now while my classroom was doing okay and, you know, there certainly were some gaps in the supports that my students needed, I didn't have to look far to see the real harsh impacts of these cuts. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the year that I decided to run in the 2020 election, I didn't make that decision lightly to leave the classroom to run in that election. But there was a clear moment when I knew that it was the right thing to do, and it was the Friday

afternoon staff meeting.

Now those who have worked in a school know that there's only one reason for a staff meeting on Friday afternoon after school is done for the week, and it's not a good reason. A Friday afternoon staff meeting has become annual traditions in schools around this province to discuss what cuts will be coming in the next school year.

The Friday afternoon staff meeting that year detailed cuts to our front office staff, those incredible, incredible women at my school who worked in the front office, those admin assistants who keep that building running, and we were seeing reductions in their hours. I think we lost one full-time admin assistant down to half-time, and it was gutting because you come to care about these people. And you're sitting there while there's tears in their eyes, and they're upset about what's coming.

That year we lost our teacher-librarian. This is years ago, years ago we lost our teacher-librarian. As a teacher, I taught English language arts, social studies, arts education. I taught a little phys ed. But it was mostly as an English and social studies teacher that I relied on that teacher-librarian for their support. Teacher-librarians have a vital role when they're in our school system. Right now they're not. Again Saskatoon Public has one librarian for all collegiates.

They do incredible work to help teachers pull together resources, to improve teaching and learning, to improve student engagement, to find resources that are up to date. Maybe teachers have been doing the same novel study for a bunch of years and they want to move on to something new. Teacher-librarians are there to support that work. Maybe they want to pull in some new up-to-date resources to engage children in learning activities in the classroom. Teacher-librarians are there to do that work.

I'll never forget the first time I had to teach *Romeo and Juliet*. It was my first year teaching and I don't have a background in Shakespeare. Not a lot of teachers do. Some might, but I had to teach Shakespeare, teach *Romeo and Juliet* for the first time. Who do you think I went to for help in planning that unit? Because teachers do a lot of planning, right, in their free time, in the evenings and weekends. Who do you think I went to for planning? I went to a teacher-librarian. I went to an incredible teacher-librarian who helped me become a better teacher. And do you know who benefited from that? My students and their families.

She helped me improve my own teaching by bringing in resources that would not have left me just simply reading through the play of *Romeo and Juliet* and somehow, you know, fumbling my way through. Which is absolutely what would have happened if I didn't have her help. It would not have gone well. So I went to the teacher-librarian. But then in this Friday afternoon staff meeting, I find out that her position is being reduced. And she'll go back to fill a role in some other classroom in some other school and we'll be without.

That same year we lost a full-time teacher who was dedicated to Indigenous support for our Indigenous students. We had a number of students at my school that came in from Whitecap Dakota First Nation through a partnership — partnerships, working well with others. And we had a teacher who was

dedicated as an Indigenous support teacher. She had done a wonderful job with her space, which was just two classrooms away from mine. And she was great at connecting with elders and knowledge keepers, traditional ways of knowing and being and learning, and she did excellent work. And she was really getting better at it, but didn't have a chance to continue because that position was cut.

At the same time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I look down the hallway at my school — this is just in my hallway — we lost that teacher-librarian just around the corner from me; we lost the Indigenous support teacher. We had a classroom at my school that was providing PAA [practical and applied arts] to grade 8 students who bused in from all around the city to take a wood shop class. That was completely cut and the room was gutted. So that program was completely stopped due to budget cuts that year.

[11:30]

Further down the hallway I had a colleague teaching math 30 to 45 students at a time, 45 students at a time. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were not 45 chairs in the room, and to be fully honest, there were not 45 students enrolled in the class. Here's what was happening. I believe that there was 41 students enrolled in the class, and four other grade 12 students just attended the class. They just came and took the class because they knew eventually one of those 41 students, without getting the support they needed, would drop out, and they would take their spot. Forty-five learners in the classroom waiting to see when a student who won't get the supports available for their learning will give up and drop out, and they'll take their spots. Students see what's happening. Students should be consulted so their voice can be included, just like the advocate did on this policy that we're looking at today.

So it was in that staff meeting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I made the decision. I had submitted my paperwork. I was mulling it over, thinking about going into politics, but that was the moment. That was the moment that I felt compelled, compelled by my colleagues but most importantly by my students and their families, that we have a government that does not invest in education so that every student in Saskatchewan has the chance to succeed. Our students deserve that. Our families deserve that.

And this bill before us today is nothing but a distraction from that record of the Sask Party government of underfunding education and forcing cuts in our classrooms that are hurting our young people today. Now we can look at other reductions and things like speech language pathologists, therapists, all sorts of other numbers in that staffing profile.

The truth is that over the last decade, the drop in per-student funding, where we've gone from first in the country to near the bottom. And it kind of depends on how you look at it. We're either sixth or eighth, but either way it's been a steady, steady decline, a drop in per-student funding. I think that amounts to a 14 per cent reduction in funding for our schools — 14 per cent per-student funding.

There's many school divisions . . . And that's if you average them all. There's many school divisions today getting less — like not even adjusted for inflation — getting less than they got four

years ago. It's absolutely wild to think that they could somehow make ends meet and provide for the needs of complex classrooms, needs that continue to increase in their complexity. Now are we here to talk about complex classrooms? We've been waiting for six years for a report from this government to address the needs of our complex classrooms. Six years. We heard promises of this before the last election. We've heard commitments from the previous minister and the one before him and the one before him, but we've seen no movement.

The complexity of our classrooms is an issue that 100 per cent merits an emergency discussion in this legislature. Is that what we're here to do? Talk about how we can better support our students? No, we're here to sow division. We're here to cut out the voice of parents, cut out the voices of educators, cut out the voices of counsellors, cut out the voices of all these people like the advocate who want better for our kids.

And to sow division in the province of Saskatchewan. To go down a path that no other province is willing to go down. To bring in the notwithstanding clause to force what the judge Justice Megaw details as irreversible and irreparable harm to children.

We should be here focused on the things that matter in our school system, and the number one concern . . . And I'll tell you what, you don't need to take my word for it. The former minister of Education, I asked him last year in committee, what are the main concerns that you're hearing from education stakeholders? I asked him in committee, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He had a chance then to say, I'm concerned about pronouns. It's not what he said. He had the chance to say the number one thing we're going to take action on is pronouns, what kids call themselves on the playground. He didn't say that. That former Education minister said . . . When I said what are the main concerns that you're hearing, he said classroom complexity. Classroom size. That's what we're hearing.

None of that was represented in last year's budget. None of that was represented in the priorities he detailed in the budget. None of that is represented in Bill 137 before us today. That minister knows what the real concerns are, but he's unwilling to address those concerns.

Will the new minister take the same course of action? Will he listen to those education stakeholders, including parents? Hear about their kids' crowded, complex classrooms? Children not getting help if they have ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] because there are no EAs available. Children not getting help if they have dyslexia or dysgraphia because there are no EAs available. Children not getting help learning the English language because they're new to Canada but their school has been forced to cut their EAL supports.

That is the real state of education in our province today. Will the new minister do his job when he shows up at work tomorrow, listen to those stakeholders, and get to work on those things that matter? Or will he continue a path of division? I hope he makes the right decision.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at some of those numbers that I detailed earlier, or some of the student numbers, we have some updated numbers today. In a news story earlier today from

Global News, they looked at some of those numbers. And again I'll say, this government knows the September 30th enrolment numbers. They know how many more students are in our schools today. They have those numbers from school divisions. They could release them; they usually do. So I challenge that minister to release those numbers today.

But when they do, what we're going to see is more students and fewer supports, just like we've seen over the last 10 years. That's what we're going to see. We saw on the news today, Global News put out a report again looking at Saskatoon, and they talked to Saskatoon Public and Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools. And they learned that we have hundreds, hundreds, over a thousand new students in Saskatoon Public Schools. And I can't remember the number in Greater Saskatoon Catholic. It was just under that, but it was a remarkable number of new students coming in.

Here are the realities that an official from Saskatoon Public Schools explained in the news. Over the last seven years, seven years, Saskatoon Public School collegiates — so the high school levels, grades 9 to 12 in Saskatoon — in seven years they've seen increase in enrolment of 473 students. During that same time period, they've had a decrease of 52 full-time educators.

That's 473 new high school students. We know many of those new students are coming in with complex needs. Maybe they need some EA support that they're not getting. Maybe they're one of those Indigenous students at my school who had that Indigenous support teacher cut through these vicious cuts coming from the Sask Party government. Maybe they're a student who is new to English. Maybe they're a student who's new to English at the school I taught at where our EAL teacher was cut from one full-time teacher down to half-time. She's only there for half a day.

Maybe some of those 473 new students have needs. Maybe some of those 473 new students don't have exceptional needs. Maybe they're more typical learners in our classroom. They're being hurt too because their teachers are run off their feet trying to meet the needs of everyone else in the classroom. And they often get overlooked, not due to any lack of work from that teacher, not due to any lack of support from the in-school administrator, but just due to the bare fact you've got 45 students in your classroom.

And that teacher, by the way, is incredible. She's absolutely incredible, the teacher teaching math to 45 grade 12's at a time. She is, in the world of education, an absolute rock star. But if she can't meet the needs of all of those typical learners . . . And so their peers are waiting for them to drop out of the class. That is the state of education in this province today.

Four hundred seventy-three more students in Saskatoon collegiates, 52 fewer educators. How does this amount to adequate supports for our young people? How does this not raise a flag that we should be gathering in this legislature, supported by all the great folks I've pointed out here and supported by taxpayer dollars, to have a serious debate about what's happening in our schools today?

They could have done it. They're choosing, they're choosing a path of division, cynical wedge politics, using vulnerable kids, trampling on the rights of vulnerable kids for their own political gain, and putting into the bill, writing into this bill protection for

themselves, protection for themselves so that people in this province who are harmed by this policy cannot take legal action against them. Shame. Shame. It's absolutely despicable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to move on to read a couple letters that have come in. We've got hundreds of them. We've received hundreds of letters, of correspondence from people in Saskatchewan, people who raise very serious concerns about this legislation and the impact that it will have on our young people and on our families.

I'd like to start with a few letters. We've got them separated into categories because we've heard so many . . . I've got a stack here from parents, and I'd like to start with a couple letters from parents.

This one is addressed to the Minister of Education. Comes from somebody named Diane. I'll be quoting the letter in its entirety, for folks in Hansard.

Dear Sir:

The policy, *Use of Preferred First Name and Pronouns by Students*, is going against what is stated in intent. My 13-year-old grandson brought that to my attention right away as I started to explain the policy after he had read it out loud to me. He doesn't understand how the policy can do the exact opposite of what is stated in the intent.

I quite agree with the stated important role that parents and guardians have in protecting and supporting their children. If every parent was capable of fulfilling that role in a healthy, safe, and supportive way, Saskatchewan would have a noticeable decrease in homeless teens, teen suicides, teen pregnancies, teen STDs, and teen runaways. The budget for Social Services, Mental Health, and Health ministries would have a noticeable decrease in size.

After your researchers have provided the data which supports these statements and after you have consulted with school and board members, Saskatchewan teachers, child mental health care providers, children's rights advocates, and ethics consultants and Saskatchewan students, you may find a need to reconsider this policy.

I trust that you will make a decision worthy of a statesman. A statesman is someone who does everything for the common good of the people whom he or she represents. Simple English from Wikipedia.

When I became a school trustee in the 1980s, we attended an orientation program which explained the process for parents to express their opinions and concerns. As a parent, we were always well informed about school activities. My son and daughter-in-law's generation seem to be very well informed too.

I am writing as a concerned grandmother, retired nurse, and concerned citizen and member of the silent majority.

Sincerely,

Diane

I think it's important to note that Diane's highlighting that parents want to be involved. Schools want parents involved. That's the kind of partnership for parental engagement that we desire on this side of the Assembly.

The support for that is a decision that could be made by this government. They could absolutely decide to go down a path of facilitating and empowering parental engagement without trampling on the rights of already-vulnerable kids. That is an option, and an option that's still on the table. We don't need to go down the path of revoking human rights and Charter rights from children that won't do anything to add in the kind of parental engagement that actually supports teaching and learning and community parental involvement in our schools.

[11:45]

I'll read another letter here. This one's coming from someone in Regina University:

I was disgusted by the announcement that was made by the Sask Party that all students under 16 must have parental consent to change their name or pronoun that is being used in schools. I am further disgusted by Scott Moe's extreme push to continue in this direction, despite loud outrage from residents and the injunction that was granted.

Scott Moe has said that the parental inclusion and consent policy has the strong support of a majority of Saskatchewan residents, in particular Saskatchewan parents. I will state unequivocally that this policy does not have the support of this parent. I am a foster parent to three amazing children and the biological parent to one infant. While I sincerely hope that all four of those children feel safe in my home, I know that isn't the reality for all children in this province.

Schools should be a safe place for our children. If my child or any child in Saskatchewan does not feel safe to embrace their true identity at home, I sincerely hope for their sake that they feel safe in the classroom setting. These children need the acceptance and protection of society.

Invoking the notwithstanding clause in this situation is frankly outrageous. A small number of people should not have the ability to stop a policy from having its constitutionality tested in court. I feel that this is a slippery slope that we're going down if injunctions can simply be ignored on a whim. Trans rights are human rights.

Hoping my voice keeps up here while I read some more letters, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm going to leave this stack here just for a moment and come back to it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to talk about what real consultation could have looked like for this government. They have a track record of ramming through ideas that they can't really point to who came up with them. We've seen that with the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation. It wasn't asked for by any divisions, by any parents and, you know, they were able to bring that forward and force it through.

Okay, Bill 70. There's another good example, a piece of legislation. Who knows where that came from? You know,

trampling on the traditions of this House to bring forward a bill to overhaul legislative security. That was the last time that I spoke for a couple of hours, I think, in this Assembly. It was on Bill 70. That was a fun night. I had fun. Yeah, I had fun. It was a good time.

But you know, there's also a history that we can point to when consultation did happen: when stakeholders were listened to; when parents were brought into the circle of decision making; when teachers, school boards, elected trustees were included. And I'd like to point to some of that history. And I'd like to look at a couple reports here today, just briefly.

And I want to note that the reports that I'm going to look at right now were completed as part of a process to prepare for the provincial education plan for 2020-2030, which we're now in. Now that provincial education plan has not been finalized and released yet, but it was done in conjunction with stakeholders, which I do applaud the Ministry of Education, the former ministers, for engaging with stakeholders. They've shown us it can be done.

Here's what happened. They worked with our 27 public and separate school divisions. They took in input from teachers, especially from the Re-Imagine Education project that the STF engaged in for a number of years. They worked with the CÉF, the Fransaskois schools. They worked with stakeholders and they engaged in conversations that led to the creation of a provincial education plan. Now while that plan has yet to be released, the process is one that they've engaged in with listening.

The report I'm holding here is a *Report of the Provincial Education Planning Team: Process and what we heard*. It's a framework for a provincial education plan, 2020 to 2030. Now I'm not going to go through this report as I did with the Children's Advocate and read, you know, line by line and read sections. But it does indicate a number of things that are very important considerations that were brought forward through consultation.

They looked at things . . . I'll just read some of the headings, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the areas that this report covers. Again, the ministry's own publication developed in consultation with stakeholders. "Pressures impacting students and schools." "Diversity in schools today." "Addressing the challenges of society today and in the future." They looked at the process of having . . . They had a provincial education summit on shaping the future of education in Saskatchewan. They looked at encouraging engagement with community members and stakeholders, and they tracked all of those engagements. They looked at findings from the survey of what needs to be done to improve education in Saskatchewan.

They looked at all of these things. They looked at pathways to graduation, looking at the different ways that students can get to that graduation mark in our collegiates, whether that's, you know, on time or finding other ways to get to that point. They looked at matters affecting instruction, safe and welcoming learning environments.

It's a lengthy document. It's 22 pages long. But do you know what's not in here? Pronouns. Pronouns. Gender identity. There's nothing in here that says that from all of this consultation and

listening, that they've heard anything that the number one issue in education is what kids refer to themselves at school.

This is consultation. This is done in collaboration. And there's not a single mention in here — years of study and engagement with stakeholders — not a single mention that the most pressing issue, the number one thing that we need to recall the legislature, bring everyone back here for an emergency debate to ram through, isn't even recognized in their own reports.

Now the Saskatchewan School Boards Association also conducted consultations. And they've issued a report called *Connections: Saskatchewan's Boards of Education Vision Engagement Report*. This was done in support of creating a new provincial education plan.

What I'd like to point out here is that this is what consultation looks like. This is a way for a government to work with locally elected boards of education, our 27 public and separate school boards. This is a way for them to work together to gather information from everyone who cares deeply about our education system.

This report was transmitted to the government. They've received this report. Again it's only a couple years old. This is not ancient history. This is 2019, preparing for the provincial education plan that has yet to be delivered. Even in 2023 we don't have that plan yet. We're three years into the mandate and no plan available.

But here's what happened in this process. And again, it's all . . . If any members opposite would like to read this, I'm happy to provide a copy. In this process — this is what consultation looks like, Mr. Deputy Speaker — they collected data. They had a working group from the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association], they had an advisory group, and they collected data. They engaged through boards of education with more than 300 engagements. Those were consultations, many of those face to face, listening to people's concerns about education, 300-plus engagement opportunities. Those engagements led to 10,500-plus people engaged across the province.

Now we've heard the minister say he has heard from tens of thousands or maybe thousands or maybe hundreds or maybe, as the court said, seven emails in August. The SSBA isn't hiding anything. They engaged with 10,500 people. They received 36,500 comments received from those engagements, 36,500 comments from public consultations on the state of education in Saskatchewan.

How many of those comments were concerned about what kids call themselves at school? Zero. There's no mention of it. Not a mention of anything through widespread consultation with people in our province. This is what collaboration should look like: listening to folks' concerns, parents, school boards, locally elected trustees, folks who know their communities well. They know their needs.

Many, many members opposite have sat on a school board. Some of those members opposite have even raised the alarm of chronic underfunding in our education system when they were trustees, but they remain silent now that they're comfortable over there. Many members have sat around school board tables. They know that local voice in education is vitally important, vitally important

because it leads to student success. It leads to student achievement.

Local voice is a great way for parents to be involved in electing their school board trustee, in attending a school community council, attending a school board meeting, being involved in their children's school. All of these things are great ways for parents to be involved, and what the SSBA has done is they've gone out and they've listened to over 10,500 unique individuals. Thirty-six thousand comments received; not a one of them raised a concern that would necessitate the bill that's before us today. Not a single one. So we've got to start wondering, when the Education minister says all of our MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] have heard in their offices about this, and then the Health minister stands up and says, I haven't heard, and the Premier says, I don't know anybody, then what's happening here?

This is a partisan message being delivered for partisan reasons, a bill that's brought forward that will cause irreversible harm, irreparable harm. And what actions have they taken to reduce that harm? Nada. Nothing. What actions have they taken to protect themselves? They wrote it into the bill. They put a clause in there to make legal action nearly impossible to hold them responsible for the decisions they're making. And I hope that every member opposite keeps that in mind when they take to their feet to vote on this bill. And if they can find the courage, I welcome them to join this debate, to find their feet. Put some comments on the record — as parents, as grandparents, as community members — about what they're really hearing.

What are the main concerns in our schools? Do they have schools in their communities that have millions of dollars in deferred maintenance needs? Yes, they do. Yes, they absolutely do. Do they have schools in their communities where students aren't getting the support they need when they arrive at school because that school has been cut to bone? Yes, they do. They have those schools. They have those concerns.

Do they have schools in their communities where there are more than 30 children in a classroom? They probably do. And if they don't, in some of our rural schools, they might not have the same numbers but they absolutely have complex needs. They might have schools in their communities where that teacher is teaching maybe only 22 or 23 students, but maybe they're multiple grades. We've got classrooms with two or three grades within the same classroom, and that teacher is under incredible pressure to meet the needs of the students who arrive every day. But they're doing everything they can. Because on this side of the Assembly we believe that our teachers are incredible and they're there to support our students.

Do members on the other side have schools in their communities where young people are experiencing mental health crises and not getting the support they need at school or in our health system? Yes, they do. They absolutely do.

[12:00]

Will those members take to their feet in this debate and raise those concerns that they're hearing, the real state of education in our province? A state of education where we have 19,000 more students compared to a decade ago, but not a single new teacher.

Will they talk about the lack of mental health supports that are available for those young people, even though we've got a minister who says he believes those supports to be ample?

I hope that some of those members can find their courage, the courage just like the human rights commissioner who resigned yesterday, whose son told her to not go quietly. I hope that they'll find the courage, just like some of the cabinet ministers did in New Brunswick where a similar policy was brought forward. And I believe they had four members of cabinet who resigned in protest because the bill was unethical, and it would cause harm to children. It's not too late to find that courage.

I've got coffee here too; I'm going to go to that next.

An Hon. Member: — Just getting started.

Mr. Love: — I'm closer to wrapping up. I'm definitely past halfway. Definitely past halfway.

You know, I think I'll maybe go for a few minutes here, do some more letters from parents. Some of them are incredibly long and I'm going to leave those for other colleagues. I'm going to go to this one.

Some of the letters that we received were from people who didn't want their names read, and that's understandable. But we will respect that when it's noted. So this is from an anonymous writer who resides in Regina University:

Hello. I just wanted to add one more voice to oppose Premier Moe and the Saskatchewan Party's irrational insistence on invoking the notwithstanding clause to impose a harmful, prejudicial policy on Saskatchewan schools, teachers, and students.

This issue needs to be left to those who know best: teachers, counsellors, students, and those parents who choose to be actively involved in their children's lives and education. All parents always have the option to participate in their children's school community and in their education and school activities.

The government's focus would be better aimed at supporting parents to learn how to better communicate with their children and promoting participation in the education system through school community councils and school boards and volunteering.

For demographic purposes, I am a mother of two who both completed their elementary and high school in Saskatchewan. My second child is trans. He did not transition until after high school but had friends in high school who did choose to transition while there. They were lucky to have a supportive school environment and a supportive circle of friends. Some had supportive families and others did not. In my experience, students exploring this aspect of their identity are stressed enough and need support and encouragement, not more judgment and certainly not more drama that such a policy will create.

I'm going to pull up another letter here in just a moment. I've got lots of folders here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'm trying to pick

and choose which ones I'll give voice to here today.

This letter comes from not a parent — or at least they didn't indicate that — but from a child and youth counsellor:

I am writing to address the parental rights bill that requires transgender children to seek permission from their parents to use their preferred pronouns and name. I will speak to my personal and professional knowledge and experience to advocate for these most vulnerable people.

Personally, I have one cousin who is gender-diverse. I used to have two. Both of these cousins were ostracized by their father when they came out to him. Both subsequently suffered severe mental health struggles. One moved out far younger than they should have and has not had any contact with their immediate nor extended family. The other killed himself.

Professionally, I have been a child and youth counsellor in Saskatchewan for 14 years. I have had the unequivocal honour of supporting some of our bravest citizens — trans youth. I have witnessed and shared tears with young people lamenting their inability to express who they are or become who they are. I've served young people who are suicidal due to not having the support nor encouragement to be themselves. Some have even feared for their safety.

I've had clients weep in my office because they are forced to live a lie. They've lamented their existence. They've become distraught as they surrendered to despair of having no safe place to be. Some clients would remain at school as long as they could, simply to delay leaving.

On March 22nd of this year, this government touted their investment of 3.5 million in child and youth mental health services. This policy will directly contribute to child and youth suicides. The hypocrisy of increased mental health funding followed by a policy of immediate mental health harm is mind-boggling and infuriating.

The news of this policy has already resulted in increased depression, anxiety, and anger, not only for trans youth but for allied caregivers, family members, health professionals and mental health professionals, all of which are the true experts who should have been consulted but were not. This policy spits in the face of our most vulnerable, and I absolutely will advocate for our trans youth. It is the humane and ethical thing to do.

This policy is inhumane and will severely hurt many children. That truth alone should not only suffice to scrap it, but that truth alone should have prevented its drafting in the first place. To be exceedingly clear, this policy will hurt children. The fact that this policy was even contemplated is a disgrace, and I'm embarrassed that it has come from a supposedly modern government.

You are on the wrong side of history. You are on the wrong side of justice. You are on the wrong side of dignity. You are on the wrong side of humanity.

This policy is inhumane. We are left to accept that the

motivation does not come from a place of dignifying and protecting Saskatchewan citizens. The motivation therefore must come from a place of wanting to maintain a semblance of power and influence. This is clearly purely political, which is a heartbreaking truth to accept.

I have little hope that this letter will result in the Sask Party recognizing the rights and well-being of transgender children and youth. That being said, I would gladly stand corrected. This will require you to set aside your political hat and consider the human side of all this. Believe it or not, I do believe you entered politics because you had a heart to help people. I also believe that heart remains in you somewhere.

Please do the right thing. Vote against this new law and make a vote that will benefit our children. Allowing them to use their preferred gender and name without permission and promoting gender-inclusive care are essential steps towards creating a more inclusive and compassionate society.

And this is from an individual who's spent a career supporting youth in this province. I think it's an important voice to bring to this debate on Bill 137. This author clearly demonstrated the harm that this policy will cause. I think that the government is aware of that harm. I believe that we can see that in Bill 137. They're aware that harm will be caused and that that is justified using the notwithstanding clause as well as including clauses that make it nearly impossible for someone who is impacted in a negative way to take action against those making this decision and against those forced to carry it out.

I want to thank that writer for sending in their letter. It's powerful words.

I'd like to go to another letter that I received, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from another mental health professional. This one is addressed to myself and to all MLAs from a constituent of Saskatoon Eastview. And she writes this to all members in the Assembly:

Dear Mr. Love and all MLAs:

It is my understanding that Premier Moe will be introducing legislation in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly that if passed will make the August 22nd policy statement titled Saskatchewan education policy regarding use of preferred first name and pronouns a Saskatchewan law.

I further understand that Premier Moe has announced that he intends to invoke the notwithstanding clause to essentially force this law into effect, indicating that he knows full well that this law will violate human rights codes and laws.

This proposed legislation is very disturbing and a fundamental violation of the rights of children and youth in Saskatchewan. I refer to September 2023 report of the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth titled *Review of Ministry of Education Policy: Use of Preferred Name and Pronouns for Students*. Dr. Lisa Broda outlined in her report the rights of a child to parental guidance while also recognizing that children are human beings with their

own rights and legally recognized ability to make certain personal decisions in accordance with their maturity and capacity.

As stated in her report, the doctrine of the mature minor directs that on a case-by-case basis, individuals of any age can consent to their own health care decisions, provided they demonstrate the capacity to fully appreciate the nature and consequence of their decision.

Dr. Broda provides a comprehensive report outlining in detail the impact of this policy — and if passed, the law — will have on children, youth, and their families. I assume that all MLAs have studied this review.

I'll pause that. I would say that was not a good assumption for the author to have, given the fact that I brought 47 copies to the Assembly yesterday and today, and not a single member from the government has taken me up on an offer to provide them a copy of that report. Sad. Sad.

An Hon. Member: — There's this thing called the internet.

Mr. Love: — And a reminder that the internet exists. I'll take a minute to respond to that heckle.

So where do you think I got it from? Like do you think I walked into the advocate's office and, page by page, took it out of a book? I downloaded it from the internet. What's in debate here is not where to receive it from. It's the willingness to read the words. That's what we're talking about. A willingness to read the words from the Children's Advocate. It's not, do I know how to find a link on a website? I found it. I can prove it. I've got 47 copies here today. I was able to do it. None of the members opposite have indicated that they've even read the report. I brought them a copy. Are they willing to read it now? Apparently not.

I'm glad that you know how to use the internet. Then do your jobs. Download the report and read it before you come to work tomorrow, and then maybe enter debate and share why you think the advocate's incorrect. You're also welcome to do that. Find the courage.

I've lost my spot, mister deputy deputy speaker, so I'm going to have to go back a little bit. Let's go back to yesterday. Got to do it all over again. I'm glad that some people are engaging in this debate here. Okay. Oh, there it is, yeah.

I assume that all MLAs have studied this review and recognized that the proposed policy and law contradicts what is well-established as best practice in terms of how we as members of a caring and compassionate society can best support and include gender-diverse children, youth, and their families. It is very difficult to understand on what basis the government is planning to proceed with this action, given the very compelling information and recommendations provided by the advocate.

In addition, the Canadian Paediatric Society on June 20th, 2023, issued a position statement titled "An affirming approach to caring for transgender and gender-diverse youth." This position statement reviews opportunities for

health care professionals and others, such as parents, teachers, social workers, and psychologists to provide affirming, supportive, inclusive, and non-judgmental care to children and youth of all gender identities.

[12:15]

As detailed in this position statement, the development of gender identity and gender cognition emerges early in life. Only a small percentage of children, 1 to 4 per cent according to studies quoted in the Canadian Paediatric Society position paper, identify as transgender when they are adolescents. Many of those children have been aware from as early as age two or three that their assigned sex at birth does not align with their experienced gender. Many of the parents of these children are also aware that their child does not identify with their sex assigned at birth. These parents are also often supportive, caring, understanding of the challenges faced by their child.

Children and youth who are transgender and gender-diverse are, as detailed by the Canadian Paediatric Society position paper, at elevated risk for adverse health outcomes including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide. Further to this, and of significance in the Saskatchewan context, risk may be mitigated by affirming experiences and environments such as supportive parents, early social transition, and inclusive and non-judgmental interactions.

In my experience as a psychologist and as Saskatchewan's first Children's Advocate from 1994 to 2005, children and youth need involved, caring, supportive parents and guardians who provide safe, protective, and affirming environments for the child or youth to grow and develop. This means promoting resiliency and agency, or the ability of the child to make choices and decisions for themselves. This means building on a child's capacity through a shared exploration of the child's emerging gender identity along with all other aspects of the child's life.

I strongly object to the direction this government has taken with its policy and proposed law, as it is in every possible way counter to what we know about how to support children and their families. For whatever reason, some children and youth choose to share private information such as their gender diversity or their future goals and desires with trusted adults who may not be a parent or guardian. A child may share private information with a grandparent, a teacher, a health professional, a religious leader, or a coach about something that they are just not ready to share with their parents or guardians.

Sometimes this reluctance to share with a parent is based in fear of reprisal, but often in my experience, the child does not want to disappoint or distress a beloved parent. Also for some children, life is generally difficult and they have learned to be very hesitant to trust anyone. For example, children or youth living in foster or group home care, or children who have experienced trauma or some form of child abuse may not be ready to talk to their parent, social worker, or other guardian. There are many reasons why a child or young person may not want to talk with their parent

or guardian about their gender, particularly if it doesn't align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Frankly, I do not understand how any policy or law that arbitrarily requires parental/guardian consent for students under the age of 16 to be called by their preferred name, gender identity, and/or gender expression is in any way in the best interest of the student, or for that matter, their parents and guardian. This policy is contradictory to the doctrine of the mature minor. Decisions must be made based on the capacity of the child rather than age. This policy does not respect the child, youth, or parents and guardians, as it dictates action that may in fact increase risks and create harm for children and youth who are already vulnerable.

As also noted by the Advocate for Children and Youth, there's also a lack of capacity in the schools to provide mental health and elder support for children and youth who will be at increased risk if this policy law comes into effect.

I am writing this letter to express my deep objection to this policy law and the possible use of the notwithstanding clause. Children, youth, and families in Saskatchewan deserve much more than this from you, our elected officials. Students and their parents and guardians need you to use your authority to ensure that the rights and best interests of Saskatchewan children and their families are fully protected by our laws. There is no evidence at all that this policy or law will improve the lives and futures of children, youth, and families in Saskatchewan. I implore you, as elected officials, to vote against this potentially very harmful, ill-informed policy law that violates the rights of children and youth in our province.

Respectfully submitted by Deborah Parker-Loewen.

I think that's a very reasonable message brought forward by the former children's advocate. Relying on many of the documents that I've referenced here and in my time on my feet, including those of the Children's Advocate, including the Justice who invoked the injunction on this policy, I think that when people take a step back and look at that goal of parental engagement — and we say yes, yes to that goal — and we look at the irreversible and irreparable harm caused by ripping away a child's rights, and we say no to that outcome.

We can see that there is a path forward. It doesn't need to be this way. This government is choosing a path of division. This government is choosing a path to sell people on an idea that there's a scarcity of rights out there, and we need to somehow create, you know, some panic around that. That's not happening. We do not need to trample on the rights of children to ensure that parents are included and engaged the way that they sure should be, and supported through the ministry, supported through school divisions, supported by in-school administrators to have parents fully engaged and aware of everything that happens in the school context. That's absolutely doable without taking away the rights of children.

I think I'll pause there with some of the letters although I do hope to come back to them as I keep going here. I want to maybe take something . . . I want to take a minute to talk about something — a few minutes — that I've become very passionate about through

this process. Now one of the things that I've enjoyed most about this job as an MLA and as critic, you know, as critic for seniors, I've learned more about seniors than I ever could have imagined and the services available, where the gaps are, what we're doing well, what we need to improve.

This is something that I became passionate about during the 2020 election because in Saskatoon Eastview we have a lot of older adults. We have a lot of older adults in the community, living in their own homes and community, living in congregate living settings, long-term care homes. I became very . . . and I've learned an incredible amount about services for older adults. I really appreciate that about this job.

But you know, I thought coming in as a teacher that I had a really good understanding of education, and I did in some ways. I think I understand the classroom and the life of a school and all the things that make that work. But there are some things that I think a lot of classroom teachers are doing and working at, but maybe they don't always realize how much work is going on behind the scenes to make that happen. And so I'm very fortunate in this role as MLA and as critic. I'm thankful for my background in education, but I'm also learning a lot about our education system.

And as critic it has allowed me to have a very different perspective than just what's happening in the walls of my classroom but to really have a broad perspective, listening to parents, teachers, school divisions, you know, trustees, directors, business officials. And it's given me a much deeper appreciation for all of the work that's going on to make our schools function and driving that teaching and learning that happens in the classroom.

One of the things that I've become very passionate about through the process of preparing for this debate is this idea of parental engagement. Now that's not to say that . . . I think my passions previously were maybe more really focused on what I was doing. So as a classroom teacher, you know, looking back, I could have done a better job communicating with parents at times. I think I got better at that over the years. I certainly, you know, worked really hard at building relationships with parents.

I noted last night that we did an annual week-long field trip. It was connected to the curriculum, social studies 9, English language arts 9, arts education 9. Field trips to New York city, field trips to Toronto, taking in the arts, taking in the culture, doing writing activities while connecting to social studies outcomes at some of the, you know, finest museums, galleries, and institutions that you could find anywhere in the world. The process of getting ready for those trips is really how I engaged with parents in my classroom. I had a bit of a special opportunity to really engage with parents because it takes a lot of trust to take someone else's child — or you know, 56 of them — out of the country.

And so that's something that I always focused on when it came to parental engagement, making sure that I was building up that trust throughout the school year with the parents that I was working in collaboration with. It wasn't about drawing lines and saying this is, you know, my job. It was about working together. It was never about creating divisions between school and home. It was about working collaboratively together. And now in this role as Education critic and preparing for this debate here today

and examining the policy that led to Bill 137, I've been able to really take a step back and think a lot about what does genuine parental engagement look like. What does it look like?

And I want to differentiate a little bit between parental inclusion and parental engagement. Parental inclusion is important. I had the honour in the spring of engaging in parental inclusion when I helped chaperone my son's grade 4 camping trip to Pike Lake. It was fun. I slept in a tent for the first time in longer than I'd like to admit, and I helped the teacher and other parents prepare meals, chaperone activities. My own son didn't come anywhere near me for 24 hours. He was playing with his friends, playing soccer, having fun, engaging with the activities that the teacher had planned. But that was awesome. That was a good opportunity for me as a parent to be involved in my child's education.

"Parental involvement" is kind of a term that I've come to understand as being on the terms of the school, so the school invites parents to be involved. And there's nothing wrong with "parental involvement"; it's a good term to use. Parental involvement means, you know, showing up at events, taking part in three-way conferences, being involved, you know. But it's all on the terms of the school.

"Parental engagement" is a little bit different term. And parental engagement, at least where the research is at on this, is describing a little bit different vision for how parents can be engaged, and that's with the family at the centre. And that's a way for schools to support the student and the family by engaging together in partnership. And it's a partnership that's focused on parental engagement, community engagement, that supports teaching and learning. That's it. Family's at the centre of that.

We can do this. We can follow this kind of path forward, a path forward that focuses on parent and family engagement, a connection between the home and the school. We can go down that path without ripping away the Charter and human rights of children. That path was available to this government, and it is still available to this government.

They can make that decision today. They can make that decision when they rise to vote on this legislation.

Parental engagement is vitally important. We know that parents are the most important person in their child's life, always. Parents are vitally important to the success of students in our schools. That point, as we've said many times, isn't up for debate here in the Assembly. We all agree on that. Parents are vitally important.

So how do we get there, to that shared goal that we have on both sides of this Assembly? How do we get to a place where genuine parental engagement, where families are centred in collaborating with the school? That connection between home and school is there to support both. How do we get there?

[12:30]

It should come as no surprise that I do not believe that we will get there with Bill 137. I believe that Bill 137 will reduce parental engagement in schools. I believe that based on consultation with parents, consultation with stakeholders, and consultation with folks who have spent their career examining the things that will improve parental engagement in schools. So if we don't go down

this road of Bill 137, what is the road that we should go down? Well we have alternatives available to us.

In 2018 the Saskatchewan School Boards Association examined this question, and they produced a report in 2018 entitled *Evaluating School Community Councils*. Now we have school community councils which are legislated in *The Education Act*, and they're functioning in all of our public and separate schools.

School community councils provide an opportunity for leadership within the school — usually the principal, the lead administrator — typically one teacher, a group of parents, and other community interests to gather together in the interest of improving student achievement and improving teaching and learning in the school. That's the mandate. They're there to provide leadership and input that will enhance student achievement in the school.

Well in this report from 2018, published by the Saskatchewan school boards, they also bring forward a number of recommendations. And this is where I think it's important because they give us a path forward, at least some potential idea that if the real goal is to enhance parental engagement, they provided us with part of that pathway. This government doesn't need to start, they don't need to start from scratch. We have input from stakeholders, including divisions and parents. They give us a path forward. We don't need to go down the path of using the notwithstanding clause to take away the rights of children.

Now, mister deputy deputy speaker, I'm only going to read a little bit here from the executive summary. It's a lengthy report. It is available on the internet; it's not difficult to find. I did not bring 47 copies. I did not bring 47, but it's on the World Wide Web and you can find it by going to SSBA . . .

An Hon. Member: — You don't want to support our forestry industry?

Mr. Love: — I love the forestry industry, okay, and I have supported them generously in my work here in the last couple days, but for this one you're going to have to find it yourself. It's 43 pages long, but I might suggest if you've read the other two and you have limited time, then this one, I think the executive summary will give you a good sense of what the path forward might be.

I'm going to read a little bit about the process here:

In 2018 the Saskatchewan School Boards Association undertook a learning-oriented evaluation of school community councils based upon a mandate from boards of education in Saskatchewan. The purpose of the review is to determine the current state of SCCs in relation to achieving their mandate, and to recommend to SCCs and education partners in Saskatchewan, areas for improvement.

An evaluation of SCCs must include dialogue with many individuals who play a role in SCCs, including SCC members, school board members, directors, superintendents and other senior business officials, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, school principals, and teachers, and this evaluation engaged approximately 120 participants in various aspects of the review.

So this again is an example of widespread consultation. And just to be clear for the members opposite, if you didn't hear the word "parents" in there, that's because that would be included as an SCC member. That's what we're talking about here. So parents were absolutely included in this because parents make up the majority of members of school community councils.

So again for those just tuning in, we're looking at a path forward that doesn't include trampling on the rights of vulnerable kids, driving up mental health crises in our schools where supports simply are not available and ample. There is a better way. There is a good way through this shared desire to see parental engagement increase in our schools.

The author of this report has brought forward four recommendations in the executive summary. I'd like to share those with the Assembly and comment on each of them as how this can improve parental engagement in our province.

Recommendation 1: That every school in Saskatchewan adopt community education philosophy and practices to create an environment in which SCCs can thrive and communities can be engaged.

1.1 That boards of education create a mandate for all schools to establish and sustain a school culture that is welcoming and inclusive to parents and community, and annually conduct assessments of such by parents and community members to determine such.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what this recommendation is saying is that boards of education can be tasked with improving parental engagement and conducting annual review to ensure that parents and community are included and involved and engaged in everything that's happening in the school. This is a recommendation that this government could, and still can follow up on, to support the work of school community councils, a vital place where parental involvement and parental voice and parental engagement is fostered and actualized in our school system in Saskatchewan.

I think that that's a good recommendation. I could think of a number of actions that this government could take if they truly had an interest in increasing parental engagement in schools.

I'll move on to recommendation no. 2:

That SCCs focus on their mandate to support improved student achievements.

2.1 That the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education and boards of education launch a communication strategy for the provincial pre-K to 12 education sector, including SCCs, parents, and communities, that clarifies the purpose of SCCs and their mandate.

2.2 That boards of education review and revise as necessary their SCC resources and supports to ensure they are grounded in and aligned with the mandates of SCCs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we're talking about here is that if this government had an interest in supporting and strengthening the work of SCCs to focus on their mandate — which is improving

student achievements — that those supports should be delivered through the ministry and supports for boards of education to meet those goals. We have seen no actions from this government that they're truly interested in seeing that improvement take place.

We've seen no increased support, no increased resources, no increased training from the Sask Party government to support the mandate of school community councils, which is a vital, a vital local voice made up of local community members — again a lead administrator, a collection of parents who care about the education their children are receiving, and a collection of community leaders, often from business, who want to be part of that school community council.

If they wanted to foster that parental engagement at this level, they would have listened to recommendation no. 2 from this report from five years ago. In fact they can still listen to that suggestion today.

Recommendation no. 3. I'll spend less time on this one, admittedly. "That education partners in Saskatchewan provide adequate supports and create new supports for SCCs." I think that what I interpret this to mean is that the SSBA are willing partners in this work. They're not hoping to pass it over to the ministry, lay it at the feet of the government and say, hey, you deal with it. They're saying, we are willing partners to provide additional supports and resources for school community councils to be effective. Effective at what? Improving student achievement. Giving our young people the best chance to succeed in the province of Saskatchewan. That's their mandate, and they're willing partners in that mandate.

I would like to use a little bit more time on recommendation 4: "That the education sector prioritize youth, parent, and community engagement as a foundation of Saskatchewan's pre-K to 12 education system and hold itself accountable to this end."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a recommendation that this government has taken no action to realize. Recommendation to "prioritize youth, parent, and community engagement." And here we are, going down this path of division. They're trying to stand on a soap box and say, we care about parents. Well they've had this recommendation for five years and they haven't done a thing. They haven't done a thing to improve parental engagement through the structures that are already in place, which is our school community councils. They haven't done a thing to enhance the engagement of parents in our school system.

Under this recommendation to prioritize the engagement of parents and communities in our schools is point 4.1: "That the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education prioritize youth, parent, and community engagement in its vision for education and subsequent strategic plan for the sector."

Now in my understanding, in the new provincial education plan there is a pillar for parental engagement. Okay. My understanding . . . Again this report has not been released, but I'm told that there is a pillar for parental engagement. Here's the problem. There's no way — there is no plan, there are no resources — to actualize that engagement. There is no mechanism, there is no avenue to ensure that parental engagement is happening. It's a plan without a plan to implement it. It's an idea. It's an idea without resources. And I don't think

that that's the right way to go.

But again we have recommendations here that are still available to this government if they truly care about parental engagement. I hope that they are listening.

Continuing to quote from sub-point 4.1: "That this strategy effectively enlists SCCs in a meaningful way and creates the expectations for schools to facilitate multiple means of engagement for youth, parents, and community."

What we're talking about here is a way for school community councils to enhance engagement with youth, youth who have been left out, their voice has been left out of Bill 137; engagement with parents, parents whose concerns have been left out of Bill 137, parents whose concerns and the public engagement are being left out as this bill is rammed through in a matter of days instead of a matter of months. They've been left out. And communities, communities that are there. Communities that do a great job supporting all of our schools. Communities who want to be engaged with what's happening in the life of a school, engaged at the SCC level, but they've been left out of the consultation on this bill as well.

That's what we're talking about here. A vision for school community councils that effectively enlists all of these members in a meaningful way — youth, parents, and community members.

I'll continue quoting here from the report: "That the plan be monitored for evidence towards this end. That the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education establish a parent engagement office to coordinate these efforts."

A clear recommendation to create a parent engagement office that would help generate genuine parental engagement in our education system. This is a five-year-old recommendation. A parent engagement office that works with locally elected school boards to bring those concerns forward.

[12:45]

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a few examples of this already happening across the country. We can look at examples from our neighbouring provinces and beyond. And when we do that, when we look at other provinces we see that most every other province has a provincial organization for parental voice. We are one of the only provinces that has no such organization. Now here's one of the pitfalls for this. It means that this government can say, we talked to parents, and there's no way to check their homework because we don't have an office that coordinates that. We don't have an organization that helps those SCCs to work together.

Alberta has that. In fact it was defunded by the UCP [United Conservative Party] government because it was effective at bringing forward the real concerns of parents. And the real concerns of parents are about crowded classrooms, leaky roofs, complex needs going unmet, concerns about teachers burning themselves out that are working so hard in support of the young people. Parents raising concerns about that, bringing those concerns forward through the Alberta . . . I think it's called the Alberta association of parent councils. That organization still exists, but the UCP government stripped their funding.

Now if we look at Alberta, we can also look at the wrong way to do it. And I want to make sure that I put this on the record. What the Education minister in Alberta did when they took away that provincial body of parent councils that gave parents a voice and helped improve engagement of parents to support student success, when that was defunded they brought in, in Alberta, a Minister's Parent Advisory Council. It sounds like a good idea, and at first I was kind of excited when I started learning about it, that it might be something that could work here. I no longer think that way, Mr. Speaker.

What this council does in Alberta is it provides a council of 40 parents that are hand-picked by the ministry. It's not genuine parental engagement. It's not the kind of local voice that will help improve student achievement in our schools. It's really picking and choosing who you want to listen to and who you don't. Unfortunately that's the exact track record that we've seen from the Sask Party government, picking and choosing who you listen to and picking and choosing whose rights you're going to protect.

So we have two examples from Alberta that paint a very clear picture of good ways that parental engagement can be fostered and ways that are not helping. We can look at other provinces. Manitoba has the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils. There's some good signs there and some signs that are not as good.

I think perhaps the Speaker is surprised that I'm still talking. But I'm going to keep going for a while.

We have other examples across the country. I think in Manitoba some of the history there is that this provincial association of parent councils was somewhat wedged by their now previous government to get in between locally elected boards and the government. And I don't think that that's the right way forward either.

We need to ensure that whatever mechanism we're using for parental engagement is not creating an additional layer of bureaucracy, one which reduces the autonomy of local boards, which is such an important part of our system. That we have locally elected trustees who are accountable to their electorate, that we have locally elected boards who are accountable for the decisions that they make — that's absolutely crucial. What we don't want to see is that parents are somehow put in there, you know, kind of wedged in there between those school boards, those locally elected folks, and the government level.

Now we can also look at Ontario. And Ontario also has a model that we could look at because they've done a lot of work . . . Oh, I've got so much I can read here.

So on page 16 of this report it states: "The Ontario Ministry of Education has a parent engagement office which supports parent engagement through information and resources."

Again this is the recommendation in 2018 given to this government to create an office here. If they were truly interested in improving parental engagement, truly interested in improving community engagement in our schools, they have all of the information that they need, all the recommendations that they need to move forward with those worthwhile endeavours. They have done nothing to improve parental engagement in our

schools.

Ontario, again, they created a parent engagement office. And I'd like to read another section here from page 16 of this report from the SSBA:

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education created a document that provides tips and examples of ways to engage parents, as well as strategies to support ongoing parent engagement such as through an annual planning calendar, formal welcoming committees, and providing childminding and transportation to parents to attend school council meetings.

The writers acknowledge that parent engagement can occur beyond the formal structures of a school council or parent involvement committee and highlight examples to do this, such as keeping the library open for parents or providing access to a computer and internet. A few examples are provided for parents to engage, such as organizing workshops with parent and community members as presenters.

Finally the writers also describe the importance of organizing parents and the community and getting parent voice. To that end, a sample parent survey is included along with tips on analyzing survey data.

I've said many times in the last two days, there is a path forward. We can include parents. We must include parents. They're the most important person in their child's life. All of us who are parents, grandparents know that to be true. There is a path forward. If this government so wishes to see genuine parental engagement in our schools, they can choose that path. If they choose to go the direction of Bill 137 . . . dividing this province, harming children, trampling on the rights of not only children but their families who just want to love their kids. They want to love their kids just like the former minister of Education said on CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] radio weeks ago: he just wants to love his kids. Don't we all just want to love our kids? They need to be alive for us to love them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Ontario has given us an example of what can be done to improve parental engagement. Again, they've created a parental engagement office to facilitate this to work with school community councils. They've given us a number of ideas of how this can work including an annual planning calendar, welcoming committees, childminding, ensuring the parents can get to SCC meetings to feed in that crucial, crucial stakeholder voice that is currently missing in a formal way in Saskatchewan, and that's the voice of parents.

I know that my colleagues on this side of the Assembly believe that there is a future in Saskatchewan where parents can have the voice that they deserve in our education system, but it's going to take a will, and there absolutely is a way. There is a way. The only thing that's missing in this current Assembly is a will from those on the government side.

Is there a will to engage parents in a meaningful way, using structures that are already in place through our school community councils, providing support for those school community councils to be effective at reaching their mandate? To provide support,

training, resources, gatherings to support those school community councils to do what they're meant to do, which is to improve learning and teaching for student success in their local communities? That is the goal. That's the vision. That's what I would like to see realized in the province of Saskatchewan.

There are a number of other considerations that we could look at from other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker, including how SCCs are funded, how they're resourced, what the terms of reference are to ensure that they're not again creating an additional layer between school boards and the ministry or the government. There's a lot to consider. And I want to say very clearly those considerations can and should be worked out through careful and honest consultation. There's a path forward when we work together. There's a path forward when we sit down at the table, when we work well with others.

The government has shown that they're willing to do this. I read earlier from the report of the provincial education planning team preparing for the education plan for 2020 to 2030. Meaningful consultations with parents, meaningful consultations with teachers, meaningful consultations with school boards. I want to reiterate again that in the consultations that came forward through the SSBA process, they had 300-plus engagements; 10,500-plus people engaged in the province of Saskatchewan; 36,500 unique comments on what can be done to improve education in Saskatchewan, and not a single one about gender identity or pronouns, not a single one.

Meaningful consultation, listening to parents on things that matter, the things that we need in our schools, that's absolutely required. Making up statistics and stories about who was consulted, and the minister saying, we've all heard from people. And the Health minister says, I haven't heard from everyone. And the Premier says, neither have I.

Well who's got it straight over there? What's it going to be, folks? Are we listening to parents of Saskatchewan on the things that matter in our schools? Or are we going down our own path that we've constructed for our own political gain on that side of the House to divide this province, to put children at risk, to take away their constitutional rights for political gain. Shame. That is not who we are in Saskatchewan.

I'm going to go back and read a few more letters here I think before my time is up. These are going to come out maybe in a little bit random order, Mr. Speaker. I'll see what we've got to read here before I wrap up.

This is from a constituent of Regina Rochdale:

Hello,

I wanted to write in order to make my stance on the current situation regarding the education pronoun policy very clear. The use of the notwithstanding clause is a gross misuse of power. Regardless of your opinions on the matter at hand, the Sask Party has already made their opinion clear on the matter and it's now before the courts. I beseech you to allow the issue to go through the proper channels and to get ruled on properly and not invoke a clause that's meant for far more dire situations than this.

There are so many other issues in education that desperately need your attention and the attention of the rest of the Sask Party. We have overfilled schools, lack of funding, dwindling support resources. These are the issues you should be focused on.

I have cc'd the NDP Education critic in hopes that they're able to tally just how many of your constituents are against this compared to the 18 people who wrote in over three months and said that they were in favour of it.

Yeah, ain't that the truth.

Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to gather a few more letters here. I've got many folders. Let's see. This person's name is Bruce. I'm not sure what constituency Bruce is writing from.

[13:00]

I'm writing you regarding the provincial government's recently announced school pronoun policy and its intent to use the notwithstanding clause under the Canadian Charter to implement it. Unlike others who may be voicing their concern, I am not writing at this time because I'm specifically in favour or opposed to the policy. Instead, my communication is for the purpose of voicing my extreme dissatisfaction with the pre-emptive use of the clause to force the government's wishes on the people of Saskatchewan.

To my understanding, the notwithstanding clause was intended to be used in exceptional situations only, that being when other options had been exhausted. And in fact, from my research I have found only eight occasions where a provincial government has used this clause since the Charter was established. And it would be no surprise to anyone that in each case it was a conservative government that was the initiator.

I understand that there are times when it may be truly necessary to use that clause, but as I said above, when all other avenues have failed. In this case, I am seeing a policy being put in place that according to news reports affects less than 1 per cent of the population; is allegedly supported by extensive consultations although nobody seems to know with who; is apparently not supported by any risk assessment research; has been temporarily blocked by an injunction issued by a Provincial Court pending further action; is getting statements of concern, petitions from parents, other governments, LGBTQ advocacy groups, human rights groups, etc.

And despite all this, the move is being justified by simply stating the notwithstanding clause is necessary to provide clarity for families, teachers, and school divisions on the issue, and that the issue is about the rights of parents to ensure they are involved in their child's decision.

What I perceive to be a lack of transparency on this issue by my government, I am personally offended that it is not just planning to use the clause yet again but is jumping directly to it as the first choice for implementation rather than as a last resort. Quite frankly, I can't help but believe that this

move may really be intended as more of a pre-election distraction to create a hot topic for voters in advance of next year's election.

I strongly encourage you to reconsider use of the notwithstanding clause this time and on any future occasion in such a pre-emptive manner. Unfortunately using the notwithstanding approach in this way can be perceived by some as being no different than having an autocratic government.

Regards, Bruce.

Powerful letter. I'm going to dig around here while I keep talking, and I'd like to find a letter from the . . . Oh, I know where it is. It's going to be in here. Which one? I didn't distribute this one, so you don't have it.

I'm looking for a letter from the FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations]. Really important to me that we include that voice here. Gosh, some of these letters, Mr. Speaker, just so long and thoughtful from the people of Saskatchewan that there's a lot to work through.

Oh, okay, I think I've got some help coming here. I'm a bit of a mess over here right now. I've got stuff everywhere. Thankful my seatmate has offered me his real estate so I can keep going.

So this is a media release from the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations in Saskatchewan. It's titled "FSIN is calling for an apology and the repeal of a recent policy by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education." It's dated August 29th.

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) calls on the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, Premier Scott Moe, and Minister Dustin Duncan for an apology, and to repeal the *Use of Preferred First Name and Pronouns by Students* policy, as it puts our two-spirit LGBTQ+ relatives in danger and at risk in a space that is meant to keep all people safe.

"The Saskatchewan government has a history of failing to consult with the appropriate parties when developing policies. Before enacting a bad policy that harms many of our sacred people within the education system, FSIN calls on the Ministry of Education to properly engage with two-spirit LGBTQ+ people, 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy groups, researchers, educators, and Indigenous people," says Chief Bobby Cameron.

Saskatchewan regional 2S representative with the Assembly of First Nations Tyler George says, "This man-made policy infringes on the rights of our people and their autonomy. Our nations have always had two-spirit, LGBTQ+ people. Our nations have always been sovereign. The youth need to be supported in schools. Their preferred pronouns must be honoured. Their gender identity needs to be respected. We are responsible to the Creator to uphold the unwritten wâhkôhtowin law: to be one, to love, honour, and respect all that reside on Turtle Island. I ask for all educators to protect our two-spirit LGBTQ+ youth and to make safe spaces within their classrooms.

Our Indigenous youth already face challenges in schools within Saskatchewan. This policy is colonial violence that polices gender identity and makes it harder for our Indigenous two-spirit LGBTQ+ youth to be supported and to succeed. The two-spirit LGBTQ+ community often has chosen family because families disapprove of who their children are. This policy developed by Minister Duncan and the Ministry of Education is a policy that will continue to oppress and harm two-spirit LGBTQ+ youth, and it needs to be repealed immediately."

I think that that letter touches on some issues that I'll admit don't receive enough attention in this Assembly. The letter from the FSIN indicates that Indigenous youth in Saskatchewan already face an uphill battle in our education system.

I detailed earlier, Mr. Speaker, my decision to get into politics at that Friday afternoon staff meeting where we learned of the cuts that would be coming in my school. And one of those cuts was a cut to the Indigenous student support teacher. I know that school divisions across this province have been faced to make similarly difficult decisions due to the lack of funding, the chronic underfunding from this government. But what has that done to Indigenous students in Saskatchewan? What has that done to northern communities where the need for supports is greater than the community where I taught for 10 years? What is the state of supports for those Indigenous learners in our schools? Well it's not good.

We saw last spring in the Provincial Auditor's report that Indigenous graduation rates haven't changed in a decade — a decade with no movement, no improvement. It begs the question, how can this be? How can this be? How can we not see a change in Indigenous graduation rates in a decade? Well here's where I think it starts, Mr. Speaker: does not work well with others; inability to listen to Indigenous leaders like the FSIN, who clearly state in this letter that this policy will harm two-spirit youth, two-spirit youth in Indigenous families who are already at greater risk, who are already in our schools struggling to get the supports that they need.

And what do they do in a situation where First Nations graduation rates haven't improved in a decade? They don't bring forward policies to help that. And the auditor, by the way, gave them the playbook. There was lots of options. The auditor set that out, having measurable goals and targets that are established well before graduation. I mean, like let's find some measurable targets along the way so that we can make sure that we're providing supports for all of those First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners in our schools. Let's find the supports that they need along the way instead of waiting for graduation and then saying, aw-shucks, 44 per cent; well let's do the same thing next year.

That's what they've done for a decade. Not a thing has changed. Are we here to debate that? That would be a reason to call back the legislature, to look at the support or the lack thereof, the targets or the lack thereof, the professional supports available at our schools for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners in Saskatchewan.

That would be a reason to bring us back here, all 61 of us, to make sure that no matter what community you live in, we are concerned and we are taking action on supports for our

Indigenous youth in Saskatchewan to make sure that our school system is there to support them. That would be a reason to bring us back here, to make Hansard staff stay till 11 at night, to have these Clerks at the Table for 14 hours a day. That would be a great reason and a great use of our time because that is an emergency.

And I'll tell you, that is a problem today. But when we look at our future as a province, when we look at our future and when we look at the growth that our Indigenous population, where we look at the fastest growing demographic in our schools — First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students — the lack of a plan to address these obvious gaps, gaps that the Provincial Auditor was raising the red flag in the spring over these incredible gaps, that would be a reason to call us back and have this debate and make sure that those supports are provided in an emergency way, at lightening speed, with everything we've got as a collection of 61 MLAs.

But that's not what this government is doing. That's not what they're doing.

Will they listen to Indigenous leaders at the FSIN who have raised concerns over this policy? Indigenous leaders who are on the side of the Advocate for Children and Youth, who are on the side of our independent Court of King's Bench, on the side of parents who are concerned, on the side of Indigenous parents who are concerned about the future for their children. They're on the right side of history. They're on the right side, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the letter that they've submitted and allowed us to read here today.

Oh boy, I'm almost out of coffee. I'm not going to leave. Somebody said, go get coffee. I'm not going to do that.

I'm going to get back to some letters from other concerned folks here. Let's see. Oh, there's so much to . . . I won't get through, I will not make a dent in the correspondence that has been provided to us from the people of Saskatchewan. I'll be lucky to get through 5 per cent, I think maybe 5 per cent of what we have here.

So I'm going to read one here, a constituent of Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland. All right. Is that the new one or the old one? I should know. That's the old one. Right, because it's changing University to Silverspring. Okay, Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland. And this was written to her MLA.

I will read it as written:

Mr. Paul Merriman, as your constituent I'm very concerned about the Sask Party government's recent anti-2SLGBTQI+ education policies. In the words of Saskatchewan's Advocate for Children and Youth, "I am deeply troubled by the impact this policy will have on the rights of children in Saskatchewan."

As an active member on the École Silverspring home and school SCC, I have spent countless hours volunteering and fundraising for the most basic supplies for our school. We receive lists from teachers every year asking for resources and tools they need to give our kids the education they deserve. I'm in regular communication and collaboration

with my kids' teacher and principal and value the relationships they have with my children. I know that they will always put my child's best interests first and work with me when concerns arise.

[13:15]

This moral panic, rage-farming approach to what should be a private and personal issue is not only alarming but stepping way over the boundaries of what government should be doing. As a health care provider, I see the government's overreach into the health care system on a regular basis — the people who know least about health care in any way, shape, or form. Most members of the Ministry of Health have never worked in the health care system at all, and now you are doing to education what you have been doing to health care, getting involved without an ounce of knowledge.

Even Scott Moe would not come up with one case of where this was an issue, proving this is really just catering to the far right. I do not support the government reaching this far into the lives of kids and teachers. I thought conservative governments were the ones advocating to stay out of people's personal lives. What happened to "Well just figure it out on your own" mentality that you apply to most other social issues in the province?

So just to clarify, I do not support outing vulnerable kids. This will intentionally fuel hatred at school, work, and home. These policy changes will negatively impact:

Autonomy and safety. Some vulnerable youth will be undoubtedly forced into unsupportive and unsafe situations both at school and home.

Confidentiality and trust. By implementing this policy, youth will refrain from seeking support from school staff they may otherwise trust, ultimately leading to further isolation.

Stigma. This policy will create a hostile learning environment where some students will be alienated and bullied.

Sexual health literacy. Universal and consent-focused sexual health education is critical to reduce Saskatchewan's nation-leading levels of teen pregnancy, HIV, and STI rates, and intimate partner violence.

I join the call for Premier Moe, Minister Cockrill, and the Saskatchewan Party government, and all MLAs, to revoke these harmful, regressive policies. And as a former Sask Party supporter you lost my vote with your incompetent handling of COVID, but if you proceed with this legislation I promise to do everything in my power to make sure you lose everyone else's in this constituency in the next election as well.

Now that is a motivated individual right there.

Okay. Lots of letters to go through here. Let's see. I'd like to read a letter here from an individual named Zane.

My name is Zane and I am an elementary school teacher.

I'm going to note I'm leaving out some details here because it relates to my son who I don't have permission to read into the record, but I do know this individual as they teach at my son's school.

My first goal in writing this letter is to thank you all for the fighting you and the NDP are doing to protect kids, to stand up for teachers, and to support 2SLGBTQ people of all ages. I have seen you out at protests, I have heard the excellent words of Carla Beck and other MLAs, and I'm proud of you for all the hard work you do on this.

To the Saskatchewan Party, I will take you at your word that you are trying to protect children and involve parents in a healthy way. Based on that assumption, I need to tell you that I do not think the *Use of Preferred First Name and Pronouns by Students* policy helps children or their parents.

Much ink has already been spilled about the way this policy endangers queer children and damages the relationship between queer kids and schools, but I would like to focus on the relationship between parents and their kids. I think this document specifically makes situations harder and messier for parents rather than creating security for them. For instance, what happens when two parents disagree about how a child should be gendered at school and each gives different permissions? What happens to the parents of a queer kid if that kid stops trusting teachers at school to recognize their identity after they see teachers misgendering their peers?

I would like to reach out to parents who have concerns about children coming out at school and not choosing to come out at home.

Sorry, I misread something there.

If you come to them from a place of love, create a home for your child regardless of their identity, show knowledge of queer identities, and listen to them, they will come out to you. I always advocate for children to find allies that they can trust with their identity and then come out to them, especially the adult members of their family.

This isn't a fight between straight people and queer people, just like it isn't a fight between parents and teachers. We all want kids to be safe. I hope we can work together on that. But for us to get started, we have to stop implementing a policy that will actively make children less safe.

I think that those are wise words from this teacher. And from the teachers that I've certainly heard from — which is an extensive number of teachers — I think that what we have in this province, teachers work hard. And I've talked about that at length here. They work hard to ensure that parents are always aware of what's being done in the classroom, involved. They're always asking for engagement.

I had said earlier I went on a field trip — like I deserve a pat on the back for going camping with my son. It was lots of fun. But that's just one of I don't even know how many times I've been

asked to help out at school. I mean, some days I'm here stuck doing this when I would much rather be chaperoning a grade 5 class on a bike trip or some of the fun things that their teacher has them out doing.

But you know, I guess what I'm trying to say, Mr. Speaker, is I don't respond to, you know, a tenth of the requests I get from my kids' school for ways that they'd like me to be involved. Teachers are doing that work. Teachers are doing that work to support kids, to support families, to ensure that parents are informed. And any messaging from this government that throws doubt on that work should be rejected by every person in this province.

We need to reject these messages that some people in this province want to keep secrets from parents. That couldn't be further from the truth. No one is talking about keeping secrets. What parents are talking about, what schools are talking about, what we're talking about is parental engagement in a child's education. We will never get in between a parent and their child. That is a sacred relationship. Absolutely we know that parents are the most important person in the life of their children. Absolutely we know that.

But we know that what this bill is aiming to do is to create a mandate for schools to enforce that will break the Charter rights of our children; that will take away the human rights of our youth; that will give this government near immunity, in the harm that this will cause, from legal action.

Mr. Speaker, I think the last thing that I'd like to read from today is underneath everything here. And, Mr. Speaker, I am aware that I'm not allowed to use a prop in the Assembly. I'm going to read from it, just like I did when I read from the textbook that taught that the Loch Ness monster is real, and the minister defended that that textbook should still be allowed in Saskatchewan schools.

I remember that day because I raised the textbook up high and I said, can you believe that this is what this government is funding in Saskatchewan schools? And it was the Loch Ness monster as proof that dinosaurs still exist today. So I learned on that day from your ruling, which I'll still respect, to not use props in the Assembly. But I'm going to read it here from my desk. I won't even raise it to show to people, but the print is very small, and so I'm going to have to get it close to my face.

Oh, the French side is on the other side. This is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and this copy is one that I had displayed in my classroom for a decade. That's why it's tattered. That's why there's many pinholes in the corners, because I changed classrooms and had to move it around and put it in different places. But it was always important to me that this was displayed, that we had this up in the classroom.

Part of our social studies curriculum in this province encourages debate in classrooms on rights and responsibilities of members of a society. And one of the activities that I often did early in the school year — like usually week one or week two — in building that learning community, you know, where the teacher is really situated within that community of learners, with students working together to drive learning forward, is we developed our own list of rights and responsibilities in the classroom.

And we included home in that. What are the rights and

responsibilities of parents and guardians and home supports? How does that work with the classroom teacher? And how does that work with students? And in my school we called that the learning alliance, all of those folks working together.

So we'd do this activity in my own classroom, kind of using that learning alliance work to have students examine within our own learning community what are the rights and responsibilities. And that's, again, Saskatchewan curriculum available online using the World Wide Web, for members opposite. Anyone can look it up. Any parent can look up our Saskatchewan curriculum if they want to know what's being taught. They can look up the outcomes and the indicators that indicate when that outcome is being met. They can look up all of the other resources that come with curriculum that help teachers and help schools to focus on what all of those folks who gave input to developing that curriculum, what they decided was important for Saskatchewan children to learn, published by the Ministry of Education and the Government of Saskatchewan.

So that's the activity that I did early in the year. My students would look at what kind of rights they wanted to be respected in the classroom. You know, off the top of my head, we would usually kind of create a document that would help us govern the way that we would be, the way that we would treat one another in the classroom. But it also helped us to understand what was expected of one another.

And I think that that's valuable in this conversation related to Bill 137. What is expected of one another? What are the values that we choose to uphold? And I have to say, what does it say when a government is willing to take away those protected rights, to take away those values, to protect themselves while putting kids in harm's way for potential political gain. What does that say?

That never ever would have passed in my classroom or any other classroom in the province, to develop a list of rights and responsibilities and then later tell your students that you're going to take those away because I had something to gain from it. That never ever would pass in a classroom. And it certainly wouldn't have met the Saskatchewan outcomes in the social studies curriculum that's being taught all around this province.

Back to what I'm holding here, Mr. Speaker. When having that discussion on rights and responsibilities in the classroom, I relied on this, on this and always invited my students to have a look so that they could know as citizens of Canada . . . While they're not at voting age yet, these children are citizens, these youth. Most of my students were 14, maybe 15 later in the year. These are citizens of Canada who are entitled to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

And I would display this to them for a couple reasons. Number one, so they could be knowledgeable — because knowledge is power — that they would know what our country, what our province believes are their rights and their freedoms as citizens in Canada. But I also put this up so they could be thankful. I think that's important. And this is where I think I'll begin to wrap up. I put it up and I directed my students to it because I wanted them to be thankful. Because not everywhere on planet earth can citizens and children trust that their rights will be protected. We have that in Saskatchewan today, and we might not have that in Saskatchewan a couple of days from now.

[13:30]

I implore the members opposite to listen to the evidence that was presented in the Court of King's Bench. I implore the members opposite, through you, Mr. Speaker, to listen to that evidence that was presented that led to the injunction, that led the Justice to say that this policy will cause irreparable and irreversible harm to children. I implore them at the very least to listen to the advice of that judge who said, let the courts do their job. Let this be heard in the courts for its constitutionality so that a decision can be made if this bill truly will infringe on the rights, the human rights and the Charter rights of our beloved children.

I go back to the minister's words on CBC radio, the former Education minister, when asked what would he do if his child was trans and he said, I would love them. I would love them. Let's let parents love their kids for another day.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Bill No. 137, *The Education (Parents' Bill of Rights) Amendment Act, 2023*. Above all, we are introducing this bill to provide clarity and prevent uncertainty and excessive delay around the implementation of the new parental inclusion and consent policy, and to integrate the policy's terms and tenor within a strong legislative framework to ensure that the rights of Saskatchewan parents are protected.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to restore and reset an honourable balance, an honourable relationship between school and home. Parents are *parentis*, not *loco parentis*. And they should be involved in the education and important decisions in their children's lives. That should be the default position.

There was a question put to me yesterday: parents aren't human rights experts, so basically how can they weigh in on this case, on this issue? My answer: ah, but parents are experts in their children's lives.

Mr. Speaker, if it's already accepted that parents have to consent before their children can go on a field trip or are provided medication or before a school can post their child's photo, surely it only makes sense that parents of children under the age of 16 should be involved if their child requests that how they are to be referred to or known is going to change, and that a new name is going to be used on class lists, timetables, student files, or even ID [identification] cards.

I have talked to parents. We all have. We have heard from thousands of parents. And keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that a certain number of letters, which one official in Education would or would not have been aware of isn't the broader why when it comes to formulating this government policy. That's not the way formulating policy works. It is a snapshot only in this case by someone who is involved in drafting the policy. Letters flow primarily through ministers' offices, Mr. Speaker, constituency offices. The fact is that we talked and thought about this policy for a long time.

And I would hope that as part of the many teaching moments that the member for Saskatoon Eastview says he would have had on

this issue with his former students, that part of that analysis would include that this issue and the broader implications are being grappled with across the Western world — in Sweden, in Denmark, in the UK [United Kingdom], in the US [United States], and in New Brunswick.

I would ask the students, why do you think that is? Last year we, along with many parents, were concerned as one division, in this city in particular, in July 2022 introduced administrative policy that required that student names and pronouns be kept confidential — that would be from parents — and not disclosed. Two provinces away in Ontario, the Toronto District School Board policy currently states as follows: “There is no age limit on making an accommodation request,” and further, that “a school should never disclose a student’s gender-nonconformity or transgender status to the student’s parents/guardians/caregivers without explicit consent.”

In contrast, North East School Division here in Saskatchewan put it best: “trusting relationships with students do not come at the cost of infringing on the trust of parents.”

And crucially, as the Premier referenced earlier, this came from Keith Keating, the director of education for the South East Cornerstone Public School Division. In terms of the policy on pronouns and name changes for trans youth:

We have always had a default position in this school division that parents should be involved regardless of age in these discussions. One of the first questions that is asked by schools is, do your parents know? And if they don’t, can we help you in having a conversation with them?

The only time we wouldn’t have shared that information in the past is when there was a safety concern for the student. I can only think of a handful of occasions in my many years of education, and most of those cases would have been for students over the age of 16.

Sounds pretty consistent, Mr. Speaker, with the policy. This is what I received from a parent recently.

Thank you for taking my call. As discussed, I just want to applaud the recent policy change that schools require permission from parents when a child asks to be called by a different name or pronoun. As parents, we should remain involved in our children’s lives. I wish this could have happened a few years ago when we started going through this.

These parents, Mr. Speaker, were not even aware that teachers, counsellors, and peers were calling their child by a different name and pronouns for an entire year. There was an instance when a counsellor bought their child a chest binder without telling them. When they called the school and questioned this, they were reported to social workers.

They came to check things in our house a couple of times. We are not on their file anymore as we were deemed a safe family.

I do think there are many other parents in our shoes who are trying to navigate this and protect our children and their

long-term best interests. I also think that some counsellors and teachers might be against this but are scared to speak up.

Can you blame them about being scared to speak up?

To that end, parents have also mentioned a BC [British Columbia] Supreme Court decision from 2019. Stemming from that, they say that they actually fear that what could be construed as “misgendering” children could be seen to constitute child abuse. That is their interpretation of that case. Parents have told me they are actually fearful about raising concerns as a result of that case. Mr. Speaker, it is time to reset the balance.

The expert whose affidavit the government filed in the injunction hearing and of course the hearing on the merits were to come was Dr. Erica Anderson, clinic psychologist, transwoman, who has said that social transition of children without a psychological assessment and parental involvement is irresponsible.

In his comments, the member for Saskatoon Eastview relied heavily on the UN [United Nations] Convention on the Rights of the Child but there are two key foundational principles that he overlooked. The first is that children — defined to mean anyone under the age of 18 — require adult guidance and supervision. The second is that the primary source of this guidance is to be the parents and not the state.

Mr. Speaker, on the notwithstanding clause in this legislation, it is only the third time it’s been used in our province’s history. This is in contrast to, as I’ve said, the hundreds of times it’s been used in Quebec. From 1982 to 1985, Quebec had an automatic legislative override in place which notwithstanding everything that would otherwise have been caught by the Charter, added to all Quebec statutes — even the *Bees Act* about bumblebees got notwithstanding.

And I wonder, why is one Canadian province said to be rewriting the rules when it avails itself of the same powers that Quebec does? Powers that provinces, including Saskatchewan with Allan Blakeney and Alberta with Peter Lougheed, fought hard for the inclusion of, as in the notwithstanding clause in 1982, as a crucial constitutional tool and counterbalance.

In an academic paper in 2010, Allan Blakeney, who had been such a strong advocate not only for the language, exclusive jurisdiction over natural resources, in section 92A but also for the notwithstanding clause, wrote that he disagreed that the use of the notwithstanding clause amounts to a “suspension of rights.” He called that a false dichotomy.

He also wrote that the notwithstanding clause, which let’s not forget always sunsets after five years, was included in the Charter to ensure that “the state could for economic or social reasons, or because other rights were found in the circumstances to be more important, choose to override a Charter right.” He also said there would be instances when “rights collide” and that “the rights enumerated in the Charter are not more important than other human rights. The Charter should not be regarded as creating a hierarchy of rights.”

We agree, and in fact it’s the difficult cases, Mr. Speaker, the challenging issues, that the notwithstanding clause is meant to

address. In this case it addresses what have been described as “foundational questions of parenthood, identity, privacy, and consent.” That’s Professor David Snow of the University of Guelph writing about our policy.

Mr. Speaker, fundamentally the notwithstanding clause is part of the Constitution, part of the long-running tension and balance between judicial and legislative, federal and provincial powers. Fundamentally the notwithstanding clause is about legislative sovereignty, and fundamentally this policy is about parental rights.

It’s also important to remember, as Professor Snow pointed out, hot off the presses last week, that constitutional democracies with strong human rights records — Australia, the UK, New Zealand — don’t actually have, or haven’t traditionally, the constitutional structures that enable the judicial branch to just strike down laws that are passed by democratically elected bodies.

[13:45]

A bill such as ours which invokes the notwithstanding clause must pass through the provincial legislature and receive Royal Assent before coming into effect. In other words the notwithstanding clause is part of democracy, and that is why we are here: a sophisticated constitutional legal instrument, and an important counterweight.

Mr. Speaker, as a former Saskatoon Public School Board trustee, what I recall more than anything is that parents wanted to be involved in their children’s academic and social upbringing. They wanted to be included. Not just some parents and not others, not just what are deemed to be socially acceptable parents — parents. And that is what all this is about.

Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to support Bill No. 137, the education (bill of rights) amendment Act, 2023.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s always a good day to be here in this historic and hallowed Chamber. Today I stand before you, honoured to represent the constituents of Saskatchewan Rivers, but also to represent the people from across Saskatchewan who are looking for a new political party for common-sense solutions.

I’m thankful for the opportunity to speak to Bill 137. I am here to voice a cause that resonates deeply within the Saskatchewan people: the defence and affirmation of parental rights.

In respect to my party, this was our cause before and during the last legislative session. Mr. Speaker, it was our cause during the parental outrage in response to the sex card incident at Lumsden High School. It was our cause during the Lumsden-Morse by-election. It is our cause now, and finally as new legislation to defend parental rights is being brought forward and debated in this beautiful Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, at our campaign events in Lumsden-Morse at the time of the by-election and from town to town and from door to door, the overwhelming majority of constituents affirmed their

support for parental rights in education. That is because they know that parents are ultimately and solely responsible for the future well-being of their own children. Nobody else.

Mr. Speaker, parental rights are not a matter of convenience. They are a bedrock of a child’s well-being and development. From the moment a child is born, parents are entrusted with the sacred duty of nurturing, guiding, and supporting them in all aspects of life. It is through this parental involvement that children learn values, morals, and gain the wisdom they need to navigate the complexities of this world that we find ourselves in.

Mr. Speaker, parents deserve to know what their children are being taught in school and to give their consent, to have a say in our education system, and to have the opportunity to influence it. They deserve to be fully informed about whether or not their children are considering major, major life-altering decisions.

Mr. Speaker, these are not radical proposals. They are just common sense. And yet, Mr. Speaker, we have political organizations and activists criticizing the implementation of these policies and the use of the notwithstanding clause to do so.

Mr. Speaker, John Carpay, president of the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, aptly responded to these criticisms, writing:

UR Pride claims that Saskatchewan’s new policy violates the rights of gender-diverse students under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But in fact, children do not enjoy privacy rights vis-à-vis their own parents. Because children are not adults, they legitimately have no right to drive, no right to vote, to get married, to join the military, purchase liquor, get a tattoo.

Children are entitled to the love, the support, the guidance and nurturing of their own parents. When parents are kept in the dark, they are severely hindered in providing these necessities. Claiming that children have adults’ rights is a perversion of the Charter.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the criticism that these policies could be harmful, Carpay goes on to say:

The court considered irreparable harm to children only in relation to the very small number of children who might have truly abusive parents. Sadly the court ignored the harm that is likely to result from keeping all parents in the dark, disregarding harm to children who are pressured, manipulated, and misinformed by political activists at school.

Mr. Speaker, some dissenters have even claimed that the use of notwithstanding clause is undemocratic. Mr. Speaker, to suggest the will of the people, the authority of this very Assembly, or the legitimate use and purpose of section 33 as supposedly an affront to our democracy, is in itself the real insult to our democratic traditions.

Mr. Speaker, this clause empowers our government to assert its legislative authority in the face of judicial overreach. This clause, enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, grants our elected representatives the authority to override a

judge's interpretation of certain Charter rights for a limited term. It's a tool designed to strike a balance between the judiciary and legislative branches, preserving the essence of democracy and the will of the people.

Mr. Speaker, why is it that our legislature should cede its powers to unelected, unaccountable and ideological judges, and to a justice system in this province and country that has become so arbitrary in respect to constitutional matters on social issues such as parental rights?

Mr. Speaker, the clear majority of Saskatchewan people stand behind these education reforms found in Bill 137. The majority of members in the people's Legislative Assembly stand behind the reforms. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to vote for Bill 137, and I am glad that this legislation will receive Royal Assent.

However I now want to turn my attention to this government. Mr. Speaker, when I stood up for parental rights here in the Assembly, they made excuses and failed to act, like they have been doing for years. Their failure and negligence, and in particular, the failure and negligence of this Premier led to the sex card incident in Lumsden-Morse, amongst countless other incidents involving sexual and physical abuse in public schools. Mr. Speaker, imagine all the children who have actually been harmed because their parents have been left in the dark all this time.

Mr. Speaker, everyone in this Assembly knows exactly why Bill 137 exists in the first place, including the members opposite. We all saw what happened in Lumsden-Morse. It's because this government now knows that its days are numbered. They can only go on for so long ignoring parents and ignoring the Saskatchewan people at large. Mr. Speaker, there's a new option now and people are looking for change. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Normally I'd say I'm pleased to enter into debate. I don't know if that's necessarily true today, so therefore I will not say it. Today we're debating Bill No. 137. Normally I would say the full name of the bill, but I also think that that is highly politicized, so I won't say that either.

The reason we're here is that the Sask Party government has announced its intention to use the notwithstanding clause to pass legislation this week outside of the normal process to ensure that the province's new pronoun policy remains in place. The Sask Party has been in power for the last 16 years, 17 years. Hmm, I've lost count.

If they want to debate the current state of education under their watch, we certainly welcome that decision, Mr. Speaker. We all know that kids do best when parents are involved in their education. And of course parents should be involved in the kids' lives, in their education. That is not being disputed here, Mr. Speaker. And I will never come between a parent and their child and neither will any of my colleagues here, Mr. Speaker.

This policy isn't about that. The Premier is trying to distract from his record. This government has cut per-student funding to the

second-lowest levels in Canada, Mr. Speaker. We have the highest percentage of kids in Canada who are learning on empty stomachs. Classrooms are overcrowded. Math and reading levels are way down. And science labs and music rooms are being converted into overflow classrooms. The bottom line is that kids do not have the supports they need.

Justice Megaw felt this policy would cause irreparable harm to a number of children. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms doesn't have an age limit. Kids have rights too, regardless of what that Justice minister may think, Mr. Speaker. That's why the judge ruled the way he did.

Every Canadian, whether you're a kid or you're an adult, has rights that are protected by the Charter, and this is for a very good reason. The Premier wants to take those rights away from every Saskatchewan student in a school. And I'll stand with vulnerable kids every day as opposed to this Premier, who wants to push them back in the closet.

Mr. Speaker, we have parents coming forward here, as was noted by my colleague from Saskatoon Eastview. Last week the Leader of the Opposition and I stood together with Sarah Mackenzie. And Sarah tragically lost her 14-year-old child, Bee, to suicide — 14, Mr. Speaker.

We called on the Sask Party government to listen to the concerns of parents, to get to work on issues that matter the most, like a lack of mental health resources in our communities and schools. There are very real crises in this province facing very real people. But instead of dealing with the crises in health care, mental health and addictions, and the cost of living, we've been called back to the legislature for an emergency sitting to debate pronouns in schools.

Too many people in this province are falling through the gaps because the government doesn't care about the issues that matter most. The supports aren't there. These are real emergencies we should be debating.

And despite claims by the new Education minister that schools have ample supports for children — ample supports for children — we know and the Sask Party government's own numbers show that these claims are false, Mr. Speaker. These supports simply don't exist. Since this Premier took office five years ago, a 5 per cent reduction in school psychologists, an 8 per cent reduction in teacher-counsellors. And these are just two of the support pillars that exist to help students in schools. Cuts, yet they claim these are adequate supports, Mr. Speaker.

[14:00]

And while the number of teachers in our classrooms has decreased by 66 positions, enrolment in the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] system has increased by 3,840 students. That means there is more work for teachers, less support for students.

And it was heartbreaking to hear Sarah's story and Bee's story when they came to the legislature the other day. Sarah's child Bee was described to always light up a room, was the first person to make their friends laugh. Sarah's child Bee changed their name to Bee after coming out as nonbinary in 2021. And after years of struggling with their mental health, Bee tragically took

their own life at age 14, following devastating news that they had lost their fourth friend to the mental health and addictions crisis. At age 14, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine?

Sarah said, and I quote:

What happened to my child and so many others should not be happening. They deserve better supports, resources, and care. This is not just a crisis; it's an epidemic. This is a system failure. And instead of talking about that, the government is trying to divide us with smokescreens and avoid taking accountability and action. We all deserve to have proper supports and funding to improve care for mental health and addictions, because what we have now isn't working and isn't enough.

She continued:

I want to know why there continues to be funding cuts for proper mental health supports, especially for adolescents. Why aren't there more resources in place, more supports? Why are people going to the hospital saying, "I'm at the end of my rope; I can't live anymore" being turned away or convinced that they're okay?

This government needs to stop playing politics and to focus on the issues that truly matter to the people of Saskatchewan.

Contrast this with the head-scratcher of why we're here, Mr. Speaker. We are here because the Government of Saskatchewan wants to keep kids in the closet. And, Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing from so many folks from across the province that they are not going to sit idly by and take it while this government tramples on the rights of kids in our province.

And some of those kids today, Mr. Speaker, have joined us in the gallery. And I want to thank them for taking the time to take interest in this policy, for getting involved in the issues of the day, and for standing up for everyone who won't stand up for themselves, Mr. Speaker.

And although we certainly don't condone skipping school, what I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that the bravery from folks that we've seen coming forward, the bravery that we've seen in some of the folks who have come forward to protest, who have written letters upon letters upon letters to members of the opposition but also to members of the government . . . I know some of these letters have hit your offices, have hit your inboxes, yet I don't hear members of the government standing up for these kids. And that's what we are here to do today and every day, and I will always stand up for vulnerable kids across our province, Mr. Speaker.

We are here because the Government of Saskatchewan wants to keep kids in the closet, because they are choosing to use the issue of gender pronouns in the worst form of wedge politics. What they are doing here, Mr. Speaker, creating these wedges, it's gross. It's unsettling and they are on the wrong side of history. It leaves me feeling sick to my stomach, Mr. Speaker, preparing these remarks, thinking about my loved ones, all the people that I care about — friends, family members, colleagues, Mr. Speaker — and this government chooses to wedge and to play partisan politics. These are people's lives.

And this policy, Mr. Speaker, this use of the notwithstanding clause, it's an attack on children, but I also have to talk about the fact that it's an attack on teachers, Mr. Speaker, and it's fuelled by right wing arguments. And these are some nasty arguments that are underlying the belief systems that are at play here, Mr. Speaker, the ideologies that are at play here, right wing arguments that teachers are grooming children or trying to persuade them on gender identity. These are disgusting, inaccurate, and insulting accusations, Mr. Speaker. Teachers are professionals.

Maybe the Premier doesn't feel that way. I'd sure like to hear him say a nice thing about a teacher in this province, because I haven't heard that for quite some time, Mr. Speaker. And this government, we know they haven't had an original idea for years now. They're tired. So they see what's working elsewhere. They're taking their cues from elsewhere. Maybe they think we don't read the news, we're not looking around, we're not seeing what's happening in other jurisdictions. But that's not the case, Mr. Speaker.

They're taking their cues from Republicans south of the border who are using this term "groomers." Same policy, overtly using this term "groomers." Ron DeSantis in Florida, now trickling into Canadian political landscape, Mr. Speaker.

And what's the problem with this word "groomed"? This is the same term that's commonly used to describe how sex offenders initiate contact with their victims, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's really important that we remember that. These groups are coming from this idea that sexual orientation and gender identity is something that's being imposed on kids and this comes from really a fundamental misunderstanding, a fundamentally wrong position about where a person's LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning] identity comes from, Mr. Speaker.

Let's talk about this word. There are some terrible accusations that are out there in the Twittersphere right now, Mr. Speaker. And I do want to talk about that because these are real people that we're talking about here. There are terrible accusations on Twitter that teachers believe in child genital mutilation, are pedophiles, are groomers, and it hurts me to see our government in this province stoking division and using these fears to bolster their political base, Mr. Speaker, for their own political gains.

This move of the pronoun policy is responding to a conspiracy theory that children are encouraged to become gender fluid by their overworked teachers who apparently have nothing better to do with their day, Mr. Speaker, and it's gross.

And I want to talk about this from a personal angle as well, Mr. Speaker, because many folks will know that my partner is a teacher, and I can't stand idly by while he is stuck in the crosshairs of some of this as well. And I just want to use a quick example of that. Grayson on Twitter on Labour Day posted — and many folks will know that he is no longer in the classroom as of the springtime but is now working an administrative job at the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation — but he posted this on Labour Day:

This Labour Day let's take a moment to reflect on the fact that the Government of Saskatchewan is putting children at

risk and fanning the flames of hate to undermine one of their largest employee groups, teachers, just to save a few bucks in the next contract.

The responses, Mr. Speaker, were appalling — personal attacks. I don't know how many members have had this happen, but just imagine for a moment the accusations that I read, you know, in the public domain directly attacking my partner who is a teacher, accusing my partner and teachers generally of pushing pornography on students, grooming them to think that kinky sex is normal. Accusations about grooming students. Someone said, "pedophile vibes," Mr. Speaker, and referred to him as a childless white man. Others replied simply with "groomer." Someone else called teachers, "delusional, dangerous groomers peddling the sick ideas of the trans cult." Someone else said, "pedo-teachers."

Mr. Speaker, this isn't one comment. This is pervasive and this is the type of division that is being stoked. These are the type of fears that are being stoked by this government. It is dangerous. It's irresponsible, and it doesn't create the province that I want to live in, Mr. Speaker. They are fuelling this behaviour. That is the record of this government. And I'm not even going to dignify any of these accusations with an answer, Mr. Speaker. They are insulting, hurtful, inaccurate. Here's what I'll say instead. This government is on the wrong side of history and it's completely irresponsible that they're stoking division on this issue.

And unfortunately it's the same tactics that we saw used decades ago. I sort of think, you know, maybe we're past this in the year 2023 in Saskatchewan. You know, we legalized gay marriage in 2005, Mr. Speaker. It's been a while. We kind of feel like, you know, maybe people should be inclusive and we should be moving on. But, Mr. Speaker, these are the same tactics we saw that led to the gay rights movement in the first place, the very same things that were being said about gay people being a danger to children. Just think back, hearken back to that a little bit. It's a completely recycled argument, and it's gross.

Similar campaigns of the 1970s where far-right religious groups characterized people who identified as LGBTQ as "trying to convert children." These are not original thoughts, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm proud of the fact that this is no longer the conversation, but it's so damaging to see these arguments being used today against the LGBTQ community, against teachers, against allies, parents who are just trying to be supportive. We all want to protect kids, and just because I don't have children doesn't mean I don't feel that. I have a niece; I have nephews. I really care about the future that they have. I really care about the environment that they grow up in, that it's an inclusive, safe, and welcoming community for them.

The government is trying to make it seem like this is all about parents. The government is playing on this fear that our kids are in danger at their schools, Mr. Speaker, and it's dirty politics.

I want to just take a moment to identify that we have a lot of supporters that have joined us in the Chamber here and that we have students that have come in that are behind me here today, so I'm sorry I can't look at them. But I want to welcome students from a whole bunch of different schools here: Sheldon, LeBoldus, Connaught, Balfour, and Johnson. Sorry, I'm having trouble reading my House Leader's handwriting.

And I also want to highlight that there are other students that are outside right now, using their voices to protest on the steps of this legislature. All of these students, Mr. Speaker, are here to stand up for their rights and that is what we are here for as well. We will stand proudly for the rights of trans children, gender-diverse children, and just protecting the rights of kids across our province, Mr. Speaker, which is something that that government is not willing to do.

They want to say this is about parents; this is about protecting our kids, Mr. Speaker. And why are they playing on these fears? Why is the government playing on these fears? Because they are afraid that people will come together. In sociology . . . You know, I was surprised someone actually brought this up to me as well, but I had already prepared these remarks. In sociology we talk about trying to create a moral panic which is usually used by those in power to limit how or what gets taught in schools.

[14:15]

And, Mr. Speaker, it's really scary to see those types of tactics being used here. It's been identified already but I think it's important to reiterate that this is a strategy to try to unify the right wing to try to get the base squared up so that the government can stay in power going into the next election. You know, they're scared of the successes of the Saskatchewan United Party. They're scared of what happened in Lumsden-Morse. They are.

And they're laughing over there about this, Mr. Speaker. But why else stoke this type of division that leads to these hateful comments, Mr. Speaker? Why else work to create a province where people are behaving this way, Mr. Speaker? This is the type of division that they are pushing. And if that's not the reason, Mr. Speaker, I'd really love to hear what it is.

This is a desperate attempt to create panic and to play on people's worst fears so that they don't lose power. Because ultimately that's what it's about for them, Mr. Speaker. It's about power; it's not about protecting kids. Shame.

And we saw this play out directly with the Premier's remarks on by-election night. Fearmongering. You know, he was sort of like let this be a lesson to the electorate of what's going to happen if you vote for the Sask United Party. Which really didn't make any sense when you looked at the election results, Mr. Speaker. I think he was just using that as an opportunity to scare people about what could possibly happen. The scary NDP will get into power. Those were the connotations, Mr. Speaker. But we all know what he's afraid of here, and he's afraid of losing his own voters to the Saskatchewan United Party. And as a result, we saw him nearly threaten the electorate in those words.

It's a playbook as old as time. We've seen this before. It happened in Florida. It's an attempt to unite the right, sweeping across the US and now into Canada. And they're doing this to divide us, Mr. Speaker. And they know that; they know that's what they're doing. The problem is, Mr. Speaker, it's not working. And we see historically that when minority rights are challenged, people will stand up. They will fight, they will join together, they will not back down, and they will fight for people who can't fight for themselves, Mr. Speaker. That has been the history of this province. It's the history of this country. And we are not going to sit idly by while they trample on the rights of

trans and gender-diverse kids.

And that's what's happening, Mr. Speaker. People are fighting back. You know, we have students today who have joined us in the gallery. We have students that are protesting out front, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk a little bit about what some people are saying about this policy. They seem to have one quote that they keep pulling out from one individual, from one school board, Mr. Speaker, but we have way more than one. We have plenty. We have plenty of quotes.

Let's start with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. On August 25th there was a *Global News* article, so this would have been the same week that the then minister of Education announced the policy. They said this policy came out of the blue, Mr. Speaker, the school boards association. You know, they say they want to consult with parents, but there's a lot of parents that join the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, a lot of them get involved in that.

They called on the ministry to put a hold on new policies that were dealing with the sexual health education and parental consent for changing student names and pronouns. President Jaimie Smith-Windsor said school boards were not consulted on these policies, and she was not surprised. And that's really disappointing, Mr. Speaker. She pointed out that we do policy best when we have robust consultation. You know, bring in experts. Bring in stakeholder voices. Work toward collaboration.

The concerns coming from school boards were that these new policies might have legal and human rights implications. It's almost like they could see what was coming, Mr. Speaker. It's like they knew that these comments and these questions would arise. Smith-Windsor said that the troubling, underlying connotations in this policy indicate that schools are not to be trusted. And this is sowing division. This is planting fear. This is planting fear that schools are not safe places for children, Mr. Speaker, which is a dangerous and irresponsible concept for this government to be peddling. She said that it was generating mistrust for what's happening in classrooms.

And this was immediately after the former Education minister introduced the policy at the end of August. And we all saw what happened then. He dropped the policy and then ran, Mr. Speaker. And maybe he knew it was indefensible. You know, maybe that's what happened there.

We saw the then minister of Education, now Minister for CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] — correct me if I'm wrong — said that implementing these policies revolved around standardizing processes across the province and making sure teachers aren't put in difficult positions as they develop relationships with parents. He defended the policy. Fast forward one week. Was it two weeks? And the minister bails on that plan. We have a cabinet switch. Maybe he realized, Mr. Speaker, he can't defend it.

What else has been said? Executive director of Egale, Helen Kennedy — that was a bit of a mouthful — said:

We should not be enacting the notwithstanding clause and ramming it through. I mean, if this is what happens to some of the most marginalized members of our communities in

Saskatchewan, it's fair game for everyone else.

Which I think is important food for thought, Mr. Speaker, is about what precedent this sets, and who is safe and whose rights are next, Mr. Speaker.

What are other people saying? Murray Mandryk was saying, "it's downright nauseating that the government hasn't really asked how its bill may hurt a kid like Bee more than it helps." So of course he's referring to the 14-year-old who died by suicide. And then he goes on:

There again, after being warned by teachers, child psychologists, lawyers, the Children's Advocate, and a Court of King's Bench Justice of the irreparable harm the new law poses, most of us might want to slow down passage of such a law and ensure it does no harm.

A little bit of sober second thought might help here, Mr. Speaker. Mandryk goes on to say,

"That was the approach of former premier Brad Wall, who preached to his caucus to leave the province better than we found it."

And, Mr. Speaker, I was here for about six months — maybe three, I don't have a good sense of time — when Premier Brad Wall was in this place, and I still remember his departing speech. And realistically, you know, I wasn't his audience.

And I still remember it very impactfully and him talking about, did we leave it better than we found it? And you know what, I'll give him this: it was a moving speech. The Sask Party, Mr. Speaker, today has no resemblance of the Sask Party that Brad Wall spoke about at that time.

An Hon. Member: — We're kind of the same people here.

Ms. Mowat: — You're not the same people though. You're very different people. You bear no resemblance to the Sask Party of years ago . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I do. Because you know what, that's what people are telling me on the doorsteps. They're telling me all over the place, "I used to support the Sask Party; now I don't recognize them," Mr. Speaker. Of course, comments through the Chair.

And, Mr. Speaker, I will remind them . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . This is what Murray Mandryk is saying. This is not what I'm saying. He's been around here for a while. He's watched a few things happen. Maybe they should start listening to some of these comments, and as I've said, there are an abundance of them.

So we get some of these comments out there in news articles, Mr. Speaker. We're also hearing so much from everyday people that will not tolerate these policies. Hundreds of protesters outside of the legislature last Tuesday. They didn't even fit out on the lawn, sort of, you know, amongst the garden around the Queen, trying to see each other. We couldn't even see the speakers, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds, I don't know, maybe a thousand. I can't remember how many people were here, but I can assure you, there are people that were here . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Certainly not tens of thousands. We will temper our hyperbole, Mr. Speaker.

But I saw people here that had driven down from Saskatoon, from northern communities, which I have never seen come to the legislature before, and new political engagement of people that thought their rights were protected but are now realizing that nothing is safe under this government, Mr. Speaker. New people that are being engaged in politics because they're realizing that this government is taking them for granted. They're stoking division, creating fear, and not at all bringing our province together, which is what we need to be doing right now, Mr. Speaker.

And of course there have been a lot of comments on social media as well. A lot of people like to post their policy interpretations on there, including Dr. Tamara Hinz. She's a child psychiatrist in Saskatoon. And she said on Twitter about this policy:

Reading this in black and white is so chilling. The confession that it violates several sections of both the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*, the admission that this could result in real harm but that they won't be held liable. This is horrific.

This is from a child psychiatrist, Mr. Speaker. Since they haven't done the consultations, we'll bring the consultations to them.

From Dr. Adam Ogieglo, also on Twitter, Mr. Speaker

With many of my patients I've shared the frustrating journey to try to get mental health support for children in our province. It is a far more pressing issue to get those supports operating and properly functioning than it is to use the notwithstanding clause on school pronoun policy.

Dr. Ogieglo works at Lakeside Medical Clinic, which I'm sure members will know operates as an urgent care centre. This is one of the places that folks are being directed to go if they need mental health supports and don't have access to those supports, Mr. Speaker. And this is one of the doctors who works there, saying that those supports don't exist. They don't have the supports. Maybe that should cause them to pause and think twice about what they're doing here.

Dr. Merle Massie, also from Twitter:

Historians know that, whether in the short or in the long run, legal opinion matters and must be considered. Policies created by legislative or executive branches should be welcome to be tested in a court of law which holds its power as an equal branch of government.

I wanted to bring this in to remind members opposite that the judiciary exists, that they don't get to make every decision about how our province runs, and that we have this balance of power for a reason. I remember thinking, when I was learning about this back in high school and again in university, you know, when am I going to need to know this stuff? When is this going to become relevant in my life? And then, snap, Mr. Speaker. I woke up one day and all of my knowledge about all these branches of government, the notwithstanding clause, all of this Canadian history — suddenly very, very important, Mr. Speaker. Maybe we'll call this a lesson, yeah.

Caitlin Erickson, folks will know as SaskCate:

The way a society treats its children speaks volumes about its values and priorities. The well-being, education, and opportunities provided to children are indicators of the society's success in its future.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard comments like this before. You can judge a society, you can judge a government based on how well they treat their most marginalized communities. It's the same frame here. The way we treat our children speaks volumes about the province that we live in.

[14:30]

Dr. Dennis Kendel, also from Twitter:

The suicidal risk among trans youth in Canada is very high. What @PremierScottMoe is doing will almost certainly increase that risk in Saskatchewan. Sadly, his proposed legislation seeks to shield him from all liability for this harm.

Eric Bell:

The thing about this whole notwithstanding debacle is the speed at which the Premier has taken this. The judicial process has not even begun. He hardly waited an hour before pulling a lever meant for emergencies only, and trampling Charter rights. That should scare everyone.

And, Mr. Speaker, I know a lot of us will remember that one hour that existed after Justice Megaw's decision came out . . . or I don't know if it's called a decision. Is it? Yeah, I don't know what the word is. I'm not the lawyer in the crowd.

After his decision came out, there was about an hour where we said, okay, you know, he's recommending that we go back to the drawing board a little bit on this. And then what did we see? What was the government's reaction? It's like they pulled a trigger. It's like they just had it in their back pocket. It had to have been written. Like the member for Saskatoon Eastview said, you know, this decision is like 50 pages long. And within one hour this government knew what they were going to do.

Now I know that lawyers have to learn how to read faster than other people, but that seems like an awful lot of dense reading to make that decision . . . Yeah. And you know what, you have to ask whether that decision was already sort of in the back pocket when the decision was announced.

But, Mr. Speaker, we're here. We're in this special session. And I'm no stranger to service. I don't have anything against serving. I know it's our duty to provide this service, to be in this Chamber as MLAs. You know, we call it "coming to work" but we know we do work outside of being in the Chamber here. I'm happy to have changed my workplace for a bit, you know, when there's a compelling reason to do so.

I've always known it was possible to get called back to the legislature, but of course in my tenure of six years in this place, I haven't seen that happen. And the House Leader opposite will know that I've also spent my fair amount of time reading the rules of the Assembly. You know, I know it's just one week's notice and we're expected to come back, so I've always operated under

that assumption, knowing that it could be possible that we would be called back for an emergency sitting. And my lifetime of service has sort of bred into me that, you know, I feel pretty neutrally about getting called to do the work. I'm like, yep, sure. Interrupt my Thanksgiving dinner, sure. You know, we'll figure it out. My family probably feels differently about that than I do.

But these are values that were instilled in me from a very young age, Mr. Speaker. You know, I went through the air cadet program. I was an army cadet officer. You know, the whole idea of volunteering. It was a youth program, working with children. You know, these are the types of values that they instill in you. And even as a kid I remember my parents volunteering a lot, and they were part of the Saskatoon General Radio Club, SGRC, which no longer exists . . . only recently. And we used to go out and have these radios and volunteer at the 24-hour relay. And so, you know, you raise money for charity. And we got to stay up all night — we thought that was cool because we were just teenagers — and watch people running all hours of the night with these radios.

Either way, Mr. Speaker, so much volunteerism in my life. So much service, which naturally called me to this job. And in cadets there's also an oath to the . . . well, King now. It was the Queen. But this is what led me here.

And usually, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to be of service to our province. I'm really proud to do the work that we do. I still approach this work with a lot of humility, but I realize this is a position of privilege that not many will get to undertake. And normally when I walk through those doors and I see the fabulous marble and we come to work, you know, I feel that sense of pride about what we're doing in here.

But, Mr. Speaker, I don't feel that this time. I don't feel that way in this special sitting of the Assembly, and that's entirely because of the issue that we're here to debate. And I didn't really know that it could be questioned in that way, but honestly, Mr. Speaker, this is the stuff — the dirty politics — this is the stuff that makes me not want to be in politics.

And when people ask me if this job is hard or how I'm enjoying this job, you know, that is as honest as I can be is that this, you know, this doesn't make me feel good about what we're doing here, Mr. Speaker. It makes me feel good about what our side of the House is doing and the advocacy that we're doing, the Leader of the Opposition's leadership on this, all of those things, you know. Our Education critic, the member for Eastview, standing up here for seven hours, Mr. Speaker, between last night and today, fighting for marginalized kids, fighting for trans and gender-diverse kids. Mr. Speaker, that makes me proud, but it doesn't mean I have to like why we're here in the first place.

When we've asked to come back to the Assembly before, and I know this because, you know, I've written some of those letters. I've made some of those calls when I was the Opposition House Leader, Mr. Speaker. And I remember one of them, quite vividly, was during the fourth wave of COVID in the fall, end of summer — I don't know, August, September of 2021 — and members opposite will remember that time as well. In Saskatchewan we registered the highest COVID death rates in Canada. We had more people dying in our province than anywhere else. We had a higher rate of people dying, and they still wouldn't reconvene

the legislature, Mr. Speaker, at that time.

The decision to airlift patients to Ontario to be treated in intensive care units in Ontario was made shortly after that, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government transferred the first patient to Ontario on October 18th, before the session had been resumed, and it struggled with a record number of ICU [intensive care unit] patients and deaths.

And shame on this government that when we called on them to reconvene the legislature at that time, they said no. It can wait. It can wait until the end of October. Record numbers of people dying, airlifting patients to Ontario, and it can wait.

But this gender pronoun issue, Mr. Speaker, oh, this must be an emergency because we are here right now. Yet, Mr. Speaker, they can provide no evidence to support that this has been an issue for people. And why is it an emergency, Mr. Speaker?

Shame on this government. Absolute shame.

And I'm not saying you have to agree with everything the opposition says, and I'm not saying that we're always right in all of these situations either, Mr. Speaker. I know there's a . . . I see a little smirk over there from the Government House Leader, who I hope is listening intently to my speech. It proves that he is when he responds to me, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not saying everything is right, but I just want to say that there are moments where you really need to re-evaluate what you're doing as a government, what is important to the people of this province. And this strikes me as a very stark contrast of when you're going to pull back the legislature for a special sitting. Like I said, happy to serve, happy to be here to debate the policies, but absolutely disgusted in why we're here, Mr. Speaker — trampling kids' rights.

And I want to take a moment to say that we've received a lot of good feedback from the youth that are here today and the youth that are out front protesting on the steps of the legislature. And I want to thank them for being here, you know. Being here is absolutely a step in the right direction, you know, taking action. Again we can't condone skipping school, of course. But, Mr. Speaker, taking those steps to stand up for themselves, to stand up for other kids' rights — that is what we are doing here today as well, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to talk a little bit . . . So we've resumed the session. They've changed the rules, for anyone who's following along but still hasn't managed to figure out why question period starts at 9 a.m. They've changed the rules to allow for the ramming through of this legislation. Again not something I have seen, Mr. Speaker. And again I've only been here for six years, but I've seen a few things, you know.

We negotiated different rules, House leaders working on both sides throughout the pandemic to figure out, how are we going to try and do this safely? And we agreed to most things in those cases. There was dialogue back and forth. Because you know what, whether there's this polarization, you know, we can both be reasonable at times, right. We can have reasonable agreement on things.

And so we agreed on all the changes to the rules with COVID. The only thing we didn't agree to, Mr. Speaker, which we were vocal about, was that we should wear masks in the Assembly. So we were wearing masks in the Assembly; members opposite largely weren't. And that was where we agreed to disagree. But this was a dialogue. This is how the process normally works, where it goes to a House Services Committee. The House Services Committee makes that decision. We bring a report forward. People in the public don't often see the bipartisan side of this when we actually get along with each other, but that happens, Mr. Speaker. And we've seen changes to the rules before that we can both agree to, again if there's a reasonable rationale for that to happen.

But that's not what happened in this case, Mr. Speaker. The government said, we're going to sit from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. and too bad if you want a supper break. No supper breaks for you. And again, Mr. Speaker, happy to serve. Happy to do the work. Incredibly disappointed with the reason that these changes are being brought in which is — make no mistake — just so they can get this legislation rammed through in one week before the next session, so that they can have their big, fancy fanfare day of the Throne Speech right on time so they don't have to send out those cancellation notices. You know, all the folks that they've invited for their big day, they wouldn't want to disappoint them.

And there's still no real explanation of why this needed to happen two weeks early. And the only counter I'll really provide is COVID. That wasn't a good enough excuse. Worst COVID rates we've ever seen — no. Literal deaths in our province, not a good enough reason to come back to work in this Assembly. It really defies logic, Mr. Speaker. And I have yet to be convinced. And I'll say this, I'm also a reasonable person. If they can convince me why it's necessary that we need to be here right now in this emergency sitting, I'll hear them out. But I have not heard a reasonable argument that has convinced me of such.

And it really makes me wonder, Mr. Speaker, about their priorities across the floor there and what they've been hearing about all summer. Because we certainly did a lot of door knocking this summer. You know, congratulations to our new member from Coronation Park. And you know, our other member, we'll congratulate him when he's back in the House. Yes, and congratulations to the new member for Lumsden-Morse as well. And then . . . What is his riding? I can't . . . Walsh Acres. And the member for Walsh Acres. Sorry, we haven't said it very many times, so you know, I have to get back into the groove of it, as you know, Mr. Speaker, and not be tempted to use my colleague's first name even though we've been friends for some time.

[14:45]

All of this door knocking, Mr. Speaker, you learn a few things. You can't help learning a few things when you have thousands of conversations with people from across the province. And it was a real pleasure to do some door knocking for my friends here in Regina. And we also did door knocking in Saskatoon and we door knocked in a couple of ridings that, you know, looking to pick up in the next election.

And I've also been door knocking in my own riding, Mr. Speaker. You never know when this government's going to

decide to run an election, and I work very hard . . . Oh, we're hearing October 28th. Okay. All right, so that's why we're here for however many hours a day? Okay. We need actually more notice than that according to *The Election Act*, so you might have to review your legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the point is we've been door knocking a lot, been hearing a lot of things this summer from constituents, from people across the province. And I would be very curious to know — you know, maybe we'll continue the show of hands thing that the member from Saskatoon Eastview was doing — how many people in this Chamber, hands up, while door knocking this summer, heard from a constituent that this gender pronoun issue was their top issue. Anybody? Oh, okay. Two. So obviously we're . . . Lumsden-Morse and Yorkton? Okay. So obviously that's why we're here. Okay, he's backtracking now. Yorkton's backtracking. He didn't actually hear it. Okay, so maybe we've got Lumsden-Morse. All right. So we've got one.

Mr. Speaker, I know we travel in different circles, but I also talk to all of my constituents. I knock on every single door. And I will talk to people and I will hear them out and we will have conversations. Even if they say, you know, I've always voted Sask Party or I've always voted conservative, I say, well I'm here to represent you and I've been in the job for a while, so you know, you might as well talk to me and tell me what your issues are. I'm not planning on going anywhere any time soon, fingers crossed, so let me know what your issues are. And people will be quite upfront with what they think their issues are . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I'm addressing through the Chair.

An Hon. Member: — No, you're not. You're asking people . . . [inaudible] . . . show of hands.

Ms. Mowat: — Sure I am . . .

The Speaker: — I just think you made your case that you're not, so please address through the Chair.

Ms. Mowat: — Mr. Speaker, the former minister of Health just misses debating me in question period it seems.

Every day, Mr. Speaker, on doorsteps, in coffee shops, at the dog park, while camping, we've heard about the priorities that actually exist for Saskatchewan people. And I've been happy to come back to talk about what we've been hearing about this summer. And it's really disappointing, Mr. Speaker, to see such a lack of engagement from the members opposite on this. Every, every one of those members voted for this bill to be introduced. They want this to happen. The entire Sask Party caucus, everyone who was here voted to move forward with their pronoun and naming legislation that will cause irreparable harm to children.

You know, that includes the Minister of Advanced Education who was instrumental in securing gender identity into the Sask human rights code. I wonder if he'll speak? It was nice to hear the Justice minister speak. But I wonder if the Minister for Advanced Education will stand up and have a few things to say about this, and will speak to what has changed. You know, if you want to enshrine gender identity into the human rights code, big thumbs up, Mr. Speaker. If you want to use the notwithstanding clause to trample on those rights, thumbs down, Mr. Speaker. Simple as possible.

I wonder what the Sask Party has been hearing about all summer. In some cases we know, because in many cases we'll get letters and they will cc us, and it'll be addressed to a minister and copied to the critic, or you know, to your constituent. There's lots of ways that we see . . . There's overlap in the letters we receive. But it really begs the question of how many members opposite heard concerns about this issue from their constituents this summer?

Now we came back last week and the Education minister said that tens of thousands of Saskatchewan people have gotten in touch with him — tens of thousands, Mr. Speaker. The following day when we asked about it again, he knocked that number down to thousands. But, Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of public record that they received 18 letters before this decision was made — 18. And how many of those letters were from parents, Mr. Speaker? Seven, seven letters. It's a matter of public record.

And, Mr. Speaker, these are court documents. You know, they would be required to put their best foot forward here. You would assume that if they had thousands of letters at this point, those letters would be going to court. Mr. Speaker, I don't think anyone's buying this thousands number.

I can say that I visited with a lot of people on doorsteps this summer. Let's talk about my own riding, Saskatoon Fairview. People are concerned about health care. They're concerned about housing. They're concerned about mental health and addictions. And a lot of people talking to me about the Wellness Centre that has drastically changed the nature of the community in the Fairhaven and Parkridge communities, Mr. Speaker.

And I don't have a lot of constituents there, but I will have a lot of constituents there in the next boundary overlap redistribution, provided I'm successful in 2024. So I took an interest in hearing folks out, of course.

They don't feel safe in their own neighbourhood, Mr. Speaker. It used to be quiet. Now there's a lot of people. You know, a lot of folks don't feel comfortable with their kids playing in their backyards; going for walks or runs, especially some of the elderly folks; or spending time in nearby parks. There's apprehensions about that as well. People in the area are visibly living rough for the first time ever. You know, we see people setting up tents all over the community, using drugs, having drug paraphernalia. There's damage to property. People are finding needles, urine on their properties, Mr. Speaker. Police are regularly called. Ambulances are regularly called.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the issues that I've been hearing about as I've been door knocking this summer. But not one person raised the issue of gender pronouns to me, Mr. Speaker.

People are talking about the fact that this government has been in power . . . I still haven't figured out if it's 16 or 17 years. Sixteen. Okay, thank you. It's a long time to be in power, Mr. Speaker. And during that time, homelessness, crime, mental health and addictions challenges — these are out of control.

And recently we saw this with the Fairhaven Wellness Centre when it announced that it would be barring 30 individuals with complex needs starting on the 1st of October. And I've heard a number of concerns about where these individuals are going to

go, where they're going to end up. And the concern, of course, is that they will end up on the streets, you know, and further strain our already impacted residents, fire, police, emergency services, businesses, community-based organizations in the area.

Over the summer there's been a resounding consensus in Saskatoon that the community needs 100 complex housing beds, treatment beds, immediately. It seems everyone has agreed that the need is there, Mr. Speaker. All the stakeholders we've talked to, community members, they agree with this. They agree that this is a good path forward. We need a place for people to go, because at the end of the day there's not heartlessness. There's a desire for safety, Mr. Speaker. There's a desire to live safely in one's home, to not have one's property damaged. And you can understand that.

And they're not saying, you know, get these folks out of my neighbourhood. They're saying get these people a place to stay. And it comes from a place of care, Mr. Speaker. And everyone has agreed that we need those complex supports. We absolutely need them.

And so I've written to the Minister of Social Services about this. I've had a number of conversations with the critic for Social Services, talked with folks, community stakeholders. And citizens in my riding have been impacted for a year, Mr. Speaker, and silence from this government. And I haven't gotten anything back from the minister. And the government only spoke out about this last week, conveniently timed with when they called session back, and realized we were going to have to probably answer some questions in here, Mr. Speaker.

And in private meetings with residents, the member from Saskatoon Riversdale says that he agrees that there is a big problem, that folks should have been consulted, Mr. Speaker, in private meetings. But we don't hear him standing up and saying that in the legislature here. But oh, he has said it to a lot of residents, Mr. Speaker, because they will talk to me and they'll tell me about the whole conversation. But he's here to say he doesn't have a say in what happens with his own government.

We need to get these issues sorted out. We deserve so much better. The people in this province deserve so much better. And those who are in need, Mr. Speaker, deserve so much better. And make no mistake, Mr. Speaker. These issues that we're hearing about on the doorstep, these issues are ones that are important to people of this province. And this is on the hands of this government — steep housing cuts, changes to social services. These have absolutely contributed to increasing poverty and increasing homelessness.

We've heard countless times from the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre talking just about how bad of a situation this government has made of our public housing, the vacant Sask Housing units, Mr. Speaker, while people are on the streets. It doesn't add up. They're failing, Mr. Speaker. They're failing us on so many fronts, and that is what people want to talk about, Mr. Speaker.

We have a growing homeless population. This requires effective housing and access to appropriate supports, and these are badly needed. But the current government appears to have no short- or long-term plan for tackling these issues, housing folks, or

addressing the growing mental health and addictions challenges as we have also well canvassed in question period. Again we see from this government a reactionary policy that is too little, too late, downloading responsibility on municipal governments. They should be partners with these governments, Mr. Speaker, but at the end of the day, the responsibility is in their hands.

And, Mr. Speaker, these are complex social issues. No one's saying that there's going to be a silver bullet that's going to fix everything all at once, but there has to be a will to try. I've seen many of these issues play out since I was elected in 2017, made worse by this government whose policy decisions often lack a basic sense of humanity, Mr. Speaker. And we saw this with the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] rates last year.

They simply don't care. Their decisions have made homelessness worse and the mental health and addictions crisis worse. Their cut to the rental housing supplement, the creation of the SIS program, and steep cuts to housing supports over the last decade have contributed to record numbers of unhoused people across our province. We need those specialized care beds and we need them now.

At the same time we need to tackle the root of the issue and listen to solutions that are being provided by community members, community-based organizations, agencies that are providing front-line services, and health policy experts. It's past time to get to work, get to the table, and sort this out. And recently the Minister of Social Services announced 15 complex needs beds. We need the expanded shelter beds, but we also need to take a look at where the need is and whether our programs will fill that need, Mr. Speaker.

[15:00]

And I've asked about program evaluation on a lot of fronts over the years in front of a lot of different committees. You know, how do you know whether your program is successful? And anyone who's run any kind of program should understand the concept of program evaluation. You know, you take your targets and then you look at the actuals and you see, did we meet our targets?

Mr. Speaker, and I know it's not that simple, but in some ways it is. And we have seen a government that is allergic to evaluating its own programs. And we see this with the mental health and addictions action plan which does not make reference to the 10-years-ago mental health and addictions action plan in a serious way.

So those are some of the issues I've been hearing about in my own community, and issues I've been seeing for myself, Mr. Speaker. And it touches close to home. You know, I live in this community as well. My folks live in Fairhaven. You know, we all want to keep our family members safe, and safety is something that we should all be able to count on as well as access to mental health and addictions services, housing, some of the basic tenets of what government should be able to provide, Mr. Speaker.

But as I said, I also knocked doors in Regina Walsh Acres — I do have it written down — Regina Coronation Park, Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood. The biggest issues that we're hearing

about, Mr. Speaker, are cost of living, affordability, health care, mental health care, the environment, housing, crime, education, Mr. Speaker. These are the biggest issues that we're hearing about.

And I know that the members opposite can try to dismiss me and say, well you know, maybe you're just only listening to certain people, or you bring out a certain side of people and that's why they're bringing up these issues to you. So you don't have to take my word for it. Give you a quick cliffhanger on that for a moment.

What are Saskatchewan people most concerned about right now? We know the government loves polling, and conveniently some came out last week, Mr. Speaker. And it appears maybe they didn't think this one through. Maybe they jumped on the bandwagon without taking a serious look at what this was going to mean for them.

The poll suggests respondents are divided on Saskatchewan government's school pronoun policy, and we know that. You know, we've heard a lot of division. I've talked about the fact that the government is stoking division with this exact policy, Mr. Speaker.

But what did we learn? Nearly 70 per cent of people disagree with the Saskatchewan government's intention to invoke the notwithstanding clause — 70 per cent, Mr. Speaker. It's almost like you should have consulted people on this. That's an overwhelming majority of people that do not agree with the use of the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Speaker, and they're using it twice in this legislation.

According to the poll, the issue of "parental rights" is not a high priority in any province. Only 4 per cent — 4 per cent — of all respondents placed it in their top three priorities, Mr. Speaker. Four per cent said this was in their top three, which once again begs the question, what are we doing here? Why is this an emergency? And they have yet to demonstrate that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the issue still trailed more than a dozen other issues, including cost of living, health care, the economy, the environment, debt, and crime. And if folks want to check this out, they can go to sparkadvocacy.ca. So even people that support their policy don't see it as an emergency, don't see it as their top issue, Mr. Speaker, and don't think the notwithstanding clause should be implemented here. What is the rush?

Let's take a look at this government's record and what they are trying to distract from, the issues that people are talking about that matter to them. We'll start with cost of living, Mr. Speaker. This is the number one issue we hear about across the province in Saskatchewan. We had members talking about this in question period today. And we've raised these issues consistently, but they're falling on deaf ears in this tired and out-of-touch government.

Inflation is one of the biggest concerns I hear, cost of living. How am I going to afford my house? Why have my bills went up so much? Cost of food. And you know what? I will happily have a conversation with people who say to me, you know, my power bill's too high but you can't do anything about that. And I say, oh, you know what? We sure can because we have this thing

called SaskPower, which is a Crown corporation. This government has the ability to make sure that you have affordable utility rates. And instead second-highest utility rates, second-highest power bills in Canada, Mr. Speaker. That's the record of this government on cost of living and affordability.

And people will talk about the cost of food. Mr. Speaker, many will remember the member for Regina Rosemont calling for an investigation into the cost of beef, cattle producers. You remember that last year? That didn't happen, Mr. Speaker, because they were saying we are being cut out of this process. The prices have been raised, but that profit is not coming down to producers. So where is the disconnect? And at a time where people can barely afford to buy meat, Mr. Speaker, this is one of the things people care about immensely. This is one of the things I talk to a ton of people about.

The price at the pumps, Mr. Speaker. We've called on the government to take similar measures to what they're doing in Alberta with the gas tax relief. No. No relief for the province of Saskatchewan. No cost-of-living relief for the people here, Mr. Speaker. Just deal with it and we'll blame the federal government's carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, the Crown, the SaskPower, the SaskEnergy rates . . . I haven't even started on increased taxes. When I was preparing my remarks here, Mr. Speaker, I was trying to think of all the tax increases that have happened since I came in, since I was elected in 2017. And I kid you not, I have forgotten all of the tax increases because there are so many of them, Mr. Speaker. Of course we will all know that 2017 was a big year for tax increases of this government. We will all remember that and all of the cuts that we saw.

And their increase, their adding to the PST in . . . And, Mr. Speaker, I see you circling, telling me to circle back. And what I'm saying here is that these are the issues that people want us to be talking about. These are the issues we hear about on the doorstep. This is the issue that matters to people. Four per cent of people want us to be here today, talking about using the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Speaker. These are the real issues that people care about, that this government could have called an emergency session on. These are very important issues to people.

They've doubled their take on the PST. They added it to restaurant meals, convenience foods, construction labour, kids' clothing, used cars, and they increased it in other areas from 5 per cent to 6 per cent where it already existed. And then two years ago what we did have? They added 32 new taxes and fees, and then they took one back. And they patted themselves on the back and did a whole statement about how proud they were of themselves for taking the tax. I think it was gym fees, which, like yeah, agreed, gym fees should not be taxed. But wow, pat yourself on the back for taking something away and giving it back, Mr. Speaker. It's just embarrassing.

We just haven't kept up with inflation. We have the lowest minimum wage in the country once again. And, Mr. Speaker, I wonder how many members here have ever had a minimum wage job or even remember what it's like to have a minimum wage job or even have family members that have minimum wage jobs. This is hard work, Mr. Speaker. These minimum wage jobs are not . . . The typical minimum wage worker is not someone you

think is stereotyped to be a typical minimum wage worker. You know, if someone is supporting their family on minimum wage they're often working three different full-time minimum wage jobs just to try to support their family, and then there's no time to spend with them, Mr. Speaker.

And we have this. We have family members, we have widows, we have seniors that are working in minimum wage jobs, working multiple jobs. We have women disproportionately working minimum wage jobs, new Canadians. There are so many people that this provincial government has an impact on, so many ways that it impacts their everyday pocketbook. People are realizing this.

And they're also realizing that this government had a year of record revenues. They're making more money than they ever had thanks to natural resources and Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. They're making more money on this, but the money is not trickling down to the people of this province, and people are done with that, Mr. Speaker. They are tired of this tired government.

They don't see themselves in these punitive cost-of-living increases. They don't feel seen. And they can't be bought off with a \$500 cheque, Mr. Speaker. I've heard people give me disappointing laughs when they talk about the cheque. What they need are targeted relief programs, but this government won't do the work to prioritize everyday people. It's not their problem that people can't afford chicken or beef anymore, and so they downplay it and hope that people will think their problems are just their individual problems.

But people talk to each other, Mr. Speaker. They're aware of what's happening. They're aware of the role that this government has, and they will not take it any more.

We could also be here to talk about the issues in education, Mr. Speaker, which is one of the biggest issues that we hear about. So the government calls an emergency session to talk about education. Let's talk about education. And yeah, education is a concern in this province, but not in the way that the government is making out. I've heard about per-student funding, class size, complexity of classes, kids' needs not being met, and cuts to education being so deep that classrooms today are unrecognizable from where any of us were when we were in school, Mr. Speaker.

When they think back to what school was like for them, I assure you it is very, very different. The class sizes are different, Mr. Speaker. The supports are very different. And the Education minister says there's so many supports in schools. The kids will be okay. We'll just make sure that all of these school supports gets provided to kids when they're forced to be outed to their parents, Mr. Speaker.

The problem is these supports in schools don't exist. It would great if they did, Mr. Speaker. I would love to live in a world where we have full wraparound supports for students in our schools. But unfortunately, that's not the case. And that's what we heard from Sarah Mackenzie about her child, Bee, who was nonbinary and died by suicide at age 14, was that these supports are not there, Mr. Speaker.

But this government thinks they know better. They think they know better than a child who died by suicide because supports weren't there. They think talking about their investments into education are going to bring children like Bee back. But they're not, Mr. Speaker. Too little, too late. And these families are looking for real action from this government. It has been far too long.

Instead what we've seen from this government are cuts to school counsellors. If kids have access to a counsellor, Mr. Speaker, that counsellor is nothing like it was when members opposite were in school. Let's think about this for a minute. You think of school counsellor, you think of someone who's always there, who's able to greet you, you know, maybe sees you once a day to check in with you, can spot whether you're feeling a little bit down, can intervene when they start to see that maybe your friend group has rejected you, you know, knows you as a student.

[15:15]

Mr. Speaker, by this government's design, the cuts to school counsellors have meant that school counsellors, some of them are on a 0.2 FTE [full-time equivalent]. What does that mean? It means a counsellor shows up on Mondays only at one school. He's at a different school on Tuesdays. He's at a different school on Wednesdays. He's at a different school on Thursdays and a different school on Fridays. How are you supposed to get to know that counsellor?

And the workload is tremendous for these individuals who are hopping from school to school just trying to help out, because they got involved in a helping profession, Mr. Speaker. They wanted to make kids lives better. But they are in an impossible situation where it's impossible to do their jobs and impossible to provide the types of supports that kids need as they're growing up, as they're developing their identity.

The Education minister and I both agree that the needs are there. What we very much disagree about . . . or sorry. We both agree that the needs, that we have needs. What we very much disagree about is that the needs are there, Mr. Speaker. Careful, I just about agreed with it.

Counsellors are serving thousands of students, Mr. Speaker, running from school to school. And it's created wait times for students that the Minister of Education has not acknowledged.

I've heard them reference a few times mental health first aid as the solution, Mr. Speaker. And make no mistake, that is not the case. Let's talk about the mental health first aid program that exists now in some schools. Mr. Speaker, the government has said that the mental health first aid will fill this role of school counsellors. Well here is the crux of the problem. You're taking an already overburdened teacher and getting them trained up on an additional course, and then making them the mental health emergency contact in the school because they have training on how to help kids through difficult situations.

I don't disagree with training teachers so that they have these skills, because certainly we've all been in really tough situations. I was an officer with the cadet instructors cadre. I have dealt with kids who have suicidal ideations. I have had these conversations with kids, and having some of those tool kits is really important.

Being trained is really important to know what to say and what not to say. I'm not diminishing the training in any way, Mr. Speaker. What I fundamentally disagree with is that this can be a secondary assignment, that somehow a teacher needs to teach in their classroom all day, spend any spare moment doing prep work for the rest of the day, doing grading for their students, and then also is expected to somehow be on call for mental health emergencies.

Considering the amount, the sheer volume of mental health concerns that kids have right now in schools, that is an impossible task for that teacher, Mr. Speaker. It is impossible that someone who is teaching all day can also be the mental health support person for that school. You just have to think about it logistically for about two minutes to realize that it's not going to work.

So the solution, Mr. Speaker, is to ramp up the supports, to provide those real supports, to have the school counsellors, to have the school psychologists that people can see, that kids can see in a reasonable time frame. Because they are dealing with some really big issues. And youth today have the burden of the world on their shoulders. You know, some of them are here with us and could attest to that, Mr. Speaker, that this is a heavy world out there.

And with the fact that we all have a computer in our pocket now, we have access to all of the information in the world. We can see all the problems that exist at all times. It's a heavy burden to bear as an adult who didn't grow up with a computer in my pocket. But there is such a heightened awareness of the challenges of the day. There's a dread about the world that we live in. Those supports are heavily needed. And we need to be listening to folks like the Children's Advocate, whose whole job it is, is to speak for kids. So dismissing . . . To hear the Minister of Justice dismiss the child advocate's report, Mr. Speaker, it's the wrong way to go.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have classrooms in desperate need of repair. We have a school in Saskatoon this week that has a hole in the roof, a very large hole, Mr. Speaker. There's pictures out there of the Minister of Advanced Education just looking, smiling up at it, Mr. Speaker, because they toured it back in June, and some of our members were there as well. They saw it. They saw the issues that were right in front of them and they heard the pleading for help with infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, the facility had to shut down. Now parts of the school are still not open. They can't have school because there is a hole in the roof leading to flooding, and yet that's not an emergency for this government, Mr. Speaker. From June they can't get the roof fixed. It's October, Mr. Speaker. It's been months since the tour happened, and we all know that tours take a long time to arrange. And since then there's been a petition from parents of the school community. And last I heard, 200 people, 200 parents had signed that petition, Mr. Speaker, urging the government to take action so that their school could function again.

But we don't see this government taking the same sense of urgency for education, for our classrooms as we do for gender pronouns, Mr. Speaker, the alleged emergency in front of us. It is a head-scratcher. I'm not quite sure how to react to that, Mr. Speaker. They're not calling an emergency session to deal with

the generational cost-of-living crisis. They're not calling an emergency session to deal with the issues in education today, the issues that people care most about in education today, Mr. Speaker. And they're not calling an emergency session to talk about health care.

I want to go back to the hole in the roof actually for a second, Mr. Speaker, because I think there's some more context here that people need. This is what the Leader of the Opposition said about it:

There is a gaping hole in the roof of this school, and the Premier has called an emergency debate over what kids call each other on the playground. Our schools are literally crumbling . . .

Seriously:

Our schools are literally crumbling before our eyes, and parents are rightly concerned that the government doesn't care about the issues that matter most.

It was June 6th when concerned parents and admins toured around with some Saskatoon MLAs and included a couple of Sask Party MLAs, the Minister of Advanced Education, but I also forgot that the member for Saskatoon Riversdale was there. Monique Rousseau school. At that time they brought their attention to the gaping hole.

Oh, maybe the member wasn't there? No, you weren't there? . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well it seems the Minister for Advanced Education wants to get into the debate, which is actually what I was asking for earlier in my remarks. I would really like to hear his remarks, Mr. Speaker, about adding gender identity to the Sask human rights code in 2014. I would really love it if he would stand up and provide his remarks about this. Seems he feels differently at this time and isn't willing to talk to us, Mr. Speaker.

After months of inaction though, Mr. Speaker, and they had their hopes up — you know what, we had a minister here; maybe we'll get the hole in our roof fixed — but after months of Sask Party inaction, again they signed . . . Two hundred concerned parents submitted a petition to get the hole in the roof fixed. They didn't fix the hole and the building flooded, and this caused classes to be cancelled on October 6th. When the school reopened, two classrooms and the library were deemed unusable. Two classrooms. We were just talking about how full classrooms are. They had to give up two classrooms and the library. It further disrupted learning, Mr. Speaker. And I hear some groaning from members opposite, and you know, it makes me want to groan too. I can't believe that this hasn't been fixed, Mr. Speaker.

It's not fair. And I hear them, you know, casting blame elsewhere, Mr. Speaker. You're the government. Get it figured out. Get it sorted out.

It's not fair for the Sask Party to pick and choose who they listen to. They've got seven parents. Seven parents send an email to the Minister of Education. They get a pronoun policy; they get a notwithstanding clause, Mr. Speaker. Seven parents. But 200 parents send a letter to the minister and what do they get? A hole in the roof, Mr. Speaker. No action on this front. It's not fair.

They have a duty to listen to all parents, Mr. Speaker, but that's not their MO [modus operandi].

So no emergency debate in education and no emergency debate, Mr. Speaker, on health care. And I don't want to sound like a broken record at this point, Mr. Speaker, but I will say I am incredibly . . . I cannot help but be incredibly frustrated with this government's approach to health care. And now we've been blessed with my third Health minister since I became the Health critic five years ago, Mr. Speaker, and we see the same problems. We see things getting worse, and we don't see the dedicated effort to fixing our broken health care system.

And it's incredibly disappointing to not see that consistency and to not see that drive and that work ethic to get it sorted out, Mr. Speaker. And we simply don't see that urge to solve the very real problems that exist within the health care system and exist within mental health and addictions, so I will address each of those as well.

I don't know what it's like for the members opposite. I'd like to be a fly on the wall one day. But the amount of people, the sheer volume of people that get in touch with my office to talk to me about health care issues, issues with accessing health care, issues with, you know, how they feel they're being treated by this government as health care workers, it is nearly impossible to manage for my one constituency assistant and myself. And we're having a very honest day here, Mr. Speaker, so I'll tell you honestly, it's nearly impossible to manage the volume of concerns we hear about.

And of course occasionally we hear good things. I'm always very happy when I hear something good that has happened to someone or good care that they've received. But by virtue of the job, Mr. Speaker, I hear about the gaps. I hear about people not getting access to care, sitting on wait-lists, not having ambulances available. We were talking yesterday about overflowed emergency rooms and how many system-wide aspects there are to health care.

You know, this is a big . . . it's a very big file, and we know that it represents the single largest spending portfolio in the government. It's also a tremendous amount of responsibility, the amount of facilities that exist, the amount of health care workers, all of the different stakeholders at play, you know, all of the different unions and communities and patients and the needs that they have. I would never accuse it of being simple.

[15:30]

But, Mr. Speaker, there has to be a willingness to make change, and that's not what we see from this government. And I do hear a lot of pride in the fact that this is the birthplace of medicare. People are proud of that. They want to protect public health care. It's based on the fundamental belief that having a surgery or a chronic illness should not bankrupt you and your family, and these are the tenets that medicare was founded on. But we are going in a dangerous direction with this government, Mr. Speaker, where they're shepherding in private company after private company, shepherding in private care, and our public system is being eroded. And we should all be concerned about that, Mr. Speaker.

And it can be easy for members of this Assembly to say, you know, I make a decent paycheque — it's public record what our pay is, Mr. Speaker — make a decent paycheque; I can pay for my health care, you know, if I need to get an MRI [magnetic resonance imaging]. It's easy for someone to say that who's in a position of privilege. But when an MRI costs \$1,000, Mr. Speaker, and that allows your family to jump the queue over someone else who desperately needs that MRI or ends up waiting for months, Mr. Speaker . . .

Their shepherding in of private services hasn't worked. They need to go back to the drawing board. It hasn't worked elsewhere either, so I don't know why they thought it would work in the first place. But I pinky swear that if they go back to a different approach, I'll go easy on them, Mr. Speaker, because you have to at some point realize that this is a failed experiment. It's not strengthening our public system. And it simply cannot be the plan moving forward, just privatize everything. That's not going to fix everything, Mr. Speaker. You need a comprehensive plan in health care.

But instead of calling an emergency session to address the health care staffing crisis, the record number of overdose deaths, instead of working to fix kids' mental health and to provide more supports, Mr. Speaker, they're doing the opposite. So let's talk about that for a little bit. Let's talk about health care.

Mr. Speaker, we've been at this for a while, both in this debate but also in my time with the various Health ministers. We've been at this for a while and it's easy to notice some trends. And one of the things that simply cannot be ignored, and it is in fact very irresponsible to ignore, is the health human resources staffing crisis. And this is something that has been, you know . . . it was raised by folks in community, by health care workers for years, Mr. Speaker. You know, we got involved and tried to amplify our voices well before the pandemic about just how dangerous this was getting, and it's easy to understand how we got there. It's all about this government's choices.

And let's talk about some of the choices this government has made. They've chosen to cut health care, look after every little slice, every little dollar that they can try to find. And this was the lean approach, Mr. Speaker. Trim the fat. It sounds good in theory; really didn't work in health care, Mr. Speaker.

And there's a couple of problems with this. Here's a good example: it might sound good to say, you know, we could save a fair amount of money in this community if we only paid someone 20 per cent of the time here. Sounds good. We're going to reduce our costs. We'll offer people a .2 full-time equivalent job. They can spend one day a week in our community or, you know, an hour three days a week just on their milk run between communities and providing care. And this is what happens, right. If you're not in a big centre, this is what happens.

And nothing against communities collaborating and trying to help each other out, because I certainly advocate for an approach that works for local communities. But what I'm hearing overwhelmingly is that this approach does not work for most people, doesn't actually add to the fabric of their community because no one is going to move to a community for a .2 job. People don't stay in those jobs. You offer them a casual job, they have a casual job somewhere else, they have another casual job

somewhere else.

Health care used to be a very good career, and for some it really is still. But you expect that you're going to go to school, you're going to get your training, you're going to be able to get a full-time job, and you're going to be able to provide for your family. And that's simply not the case in many of these health careers, Mr. Speaker.

And the government will say, oh, they're talking down health care workers. A hundred per cent not. That is not what's happening here, Mr. Speaker. To be crystal clear, we are talking down their policy and how they treat health care workers. We know that retention strategies are necessary, Mr. Speaker. And without retention strategies we have high turnover rates; a loss of key skill sets, Mr. Speaker; impacts on organizational capacity; a loss of institutional knowledge; and significant impacts to staff morale.

It's so important that we keep people around, and we haven't seen the government take that seriously. And we haven't seen them ask questions about why staff are leaving. And none of this should be new to the Health minister because although he's a new Health minister he was in a Health minister role before as the Minister for Rural and Remote Health, and Mental Health and Addictions, and Seniors, which is a lot of health as well. And he has sat in these rooms. And he has sat in these committee rooms, and he has heard me have these conversations with the former minister of Health, so this is not new, Mr. Speaker.

But they refuse to implement a fresh approach that will actually work on improving staff morale, address burnout, and make sure that we can keep existing staff around, Mr. Speaker. And this is clearly what the Provincial Auditor laid out as well. The Provincial Auditor laid out in plain black and white and blue in the reports — if you know you know — laid out her concerns around the fact that this is not sustainable and that retention needs to be a huge part, and talked about the staff gap that was anticipated in the future and the significant need to do more on this front, Mr. Speaker.

And I've asked the former minister of Health before, you know, are you looking at these exit interviews? Are you having exit interviews with people who are leaving the health care system? Because there are many different components to this. Again it's not simple but there's many different pieces.

You bring people in, which the government constantly talks about, the people that they've brought in. But on the other side there are people leaving. You bring people in, but they're also going out, Mr. Speaker. And there's all the stuff that happens in the middle. You know, at the beginning we need to recruit people into the positions. We need to train them up, but we need to actually retain them as well. And anyone who's run a business knows that it's worthwhile to train your employees, to keep them happy. Because from a purely resource perspective, training a new employee is more resource intensive than keeping an old employee on the team.

And they have to know that. They claim to be good managers. They claim to understand business, Mr. Speaker. They treat health care as a business. That's what they say anyway. The annual plan is now called the business plan in health care. They

believe it's a business, but they're not using responsible business policies, let alone the fact that it's terrible for the people that work in health care to have to be burnt-out and overburdened.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is not an emergency, you know, even though we are paying countless health care workers highly marked-up prices through contract services, through private agencies to fill these gaps. And I say unknown because, Mr. Speaker, I had a conversation with the minister about this in committee last year and I was assured, don't worry, we'll get you those charts. Don't worry, we will give you all the information about which companies we're providing contracts to for nursing, for contract employees.

I asked about it because I know that it's impacting staff morale. Because when you have someone who's working alongside you who's making two or three times as much money as you doing the same work, that's going to impact staff morale, Mr. Speaker.

And we know that these contract workers are required in a lot of cases, you know. Some people who are working those positions refer to them as a godsend because they know that they wouldn't be functioning without that extra member of the team. But they are just in such a desperate situation at this point that that's where we've landed. You know, they're kind of like, if I get this buddy to come in and help but they're getting paid three times more than me, I guess that's what we have to do.

But what incentive does that provide to keep people, you know, the nurse that's been working that facility for 25 years? Where is the incentive for that person, Mr. Speaker, the person who knows everything and knows everyone in the community and is holding that facility together? How are we keeping that person around?

And that's not being addressed because they don't have a long-term plan on this front. Their plan is just to fill the gap with contract employees. And we talked about how much money this is costing just in the North Battleford area. We ended up getting some documents about the North Battleford area we were asking about. But this government said, oh, it's all in the SHA annual report. And I was like, what page? And they couldn't . . . Of course they were saying, like oh, all of our spending, everyone we pay. Well yeah, okay, in Public Accounts. But if you don't know the names of the companies, Mr. Speaker, you're not going to be able to figure that out.

And if you don't know how many discrete contracts have existed and how many days of pay those exist . . . I fully asked the Minister of Health, do you know how much we're paying these people? Which is maybe something you would expect to hear from an allegedly fiscally conservative government. Maybe they would care about how much this is costing them. These guys don't care about that. And I said, well how many people are you paying? Oh it's, you know, it's no different than any other contract we would be providing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to watch my language in this Assembly, but I do have a few words on that. I'll say that.

We don't know which agencies are providing these contracts. We don't know how many people are providing these contracts. We don't know how many facilities these folks are in. And we know that people are being pulled from the public workforce into the

private workforce. This is like a vacuum pulling people out of the system, pulling health care workers out of the system. This might be a question you would ask someone on an exit interview, Mr. Speaker. Why are you leaving? What incentives do you have to leave and how are we going to fix this?

But this government doesn't have long-term plans. They have short-term plans that help out their buddies in private companies, and there's no real effort in putting . . . There's no real effort in terms of how you're addressing this issue. And if there were, Mr. Speaker, maybe they would have something to present me on this front.

But yet this happened in April, Mr. Speaker. I'm still waiting for my email that tells me about . . . It was coming the next day, I assure you. Still waiting for that email to tell me about who these contract nurses are, how much they're costing us, what these companies . . . Oh, I'm sure it got lost in the mail. Yeah, I'm absolutely sure.

To not know how much they're getting paid, Mr. Speaker, completely irresponsible and shows a lack of seriousness toward the gravity of this problem. And the Health minister at the time actually said it was none of our business. I forgot about this. Hold on. "It's, frankly, it's none of our business as to how the employee-employer relationship is or how that employee is compensated from that business."

Mr. Speaker, it is our business. It's everyone's business to know what these dealings are. It would be laughable but it's just so sad, Mr. Speaker.

[15:45]

Let's talk about health care. Let's talk a little bit more. I've got a lot to say here. Yeah, this is what you're in for. You asked for us to talk about this. Yet this is not, this is not an emergency to these folks, the fact that we are bleeding health care workers from the system. Not an emergency, the fact that we have the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses' president saying, we want to work on a task force; we want to help you retain people; we want a seat at the table. And it falls on deaf ears of this government.

We are bringing in a lot of Filipino workers into the health care system. Great, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses says, we've done this before; we've seen this movie before; we know how this goes. We know what supports people need. Bring us to the table and we can help you out. We can help you to make sure that there is retention of these workers. And the government says, no, we got this; we don't need your help.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many issues here that we could be debating as an emergency. But for some reason this government thinks that their chosen issue, the 4 per cent of people that believe we should be pressing ahead as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker, they choose to serve the 4 per cent.

But, Mr. Speaker, do you know that health care staffing impacts access to health care across this province? Every type of health care. And we hear about these issues every single day, Mr. Speaker. What we don't hear about is gender pronouns in schools. What my office has not received a single piece of information about, up until the point that this bill was introduced,

was gender pronouns in schools or sexual health education in schools, Mr. Speaker. Those are simply not issues that have been brought forward to my office.

But what we do hear about, Mr. Speaker, is the crisis in our health care system. What we do hear about is concerns over the mismanagement in our health care system. We hear about nursing burnout. We hear about the failure to work with health care workers. We hear about the 200,000 people without a family doctor or primary care provider in this province, Mr. Speaker — 200,000 people.

The government has finally agreed that the compensation model should be changed for doctors. There is an announcement about it and then nothing, Mr. Speaker. And doctors are waiting.

And in the meantime a whole new set of doctors graduated, and I'm hearing from current residents they don't see hope here. They don't see a future here. They're looking elsewhere, Mr. Speaker. And that should be very concerning to the government. It should be very concerning.

And maybe it's good if, you know, folks have doctors. But what I hear from folks when I go door knocking is that they don't. But I hear when people desperately call my office asking me which doctors are accepting new patients, and we have to give them the latest scuttlebutt we've been hearing on the street about which doctors are accepting new patients. And trust me, we work very hard to make sure we know that because this government took down the website that included that information. They don't even . . . They don't believe people need access to a family doctor, and they don't believe people need access to a website that tells them where they can get a family doctor, Mr. Speaker. It's the opposite of providing health care. It's the opposite of what needs to be done.

And doctors were so relieved when they got this information about the compensation model being changed. You know, I remember Dr. Tomi Mitchell closing her practice in Regina here and talking about all the overhead costs and the administrative burdens. These people need action from this government.

These are the issues we are hearing about. We are not hearing about the gender pronoun issue.

And these doctors are still waiting. And many of them are telling me that they would be leaving this province right now if they weren't locked into contracts as partners at their clinic, if they weren't too far in, because at the end of the day this is set up as a business arrangement for them.

We need to do what we can and we need to do so much better, Mr. Speaker. And we need to work to make sure that there's hope for these folks, that there's hope for people of our province, and that there's hope for health care providers in the system.

These are the issues that we should be putting at the top of the list, Mr. Speaker. We could have an emergency session based on all of the emergency rooms that are full under this government's watch, Mr. Speaker. And we have had countless people that have come to the legislature to talk about these issues.

You know, you want to listen to parents. We have so many

parents that have come through this Assembly, and people should not have to sit in those galleries in order to get action from this government.

We heard from Jill Kakoske, who spent 16 hours in a waiting room. We heard about the fact that there were 587 times when someone called for an ambulance but no ambulance was available, and that was between January and May, Mr. Speaker.

We heard from Sharon Chartier. She waited on her floor in Saskatoon having heart problems. She's within walking distance to RUH [Royal University Hospital], Mr. Speaker. She waited for an hour for someone to arrive. She was saying goodbye to her loved ones. She had a career in health care. She knew what heart problems were, Mr. Speaker.

You've heard of ambulance shortages. And really we're only hearing about them because this is the information that's publicly available. It doesn't even include the private systems. Those 587 calls didn't even include Saskatoon, which is a huge, huge component, Mr. Speaker. But it was people from Regina, Shaunavon, Esterhazy, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Ituna, Beauval, Langenburg, Estevan, Kindersley, Wilkie, Melville — the list goes on and on of places where people called for an ambulance but there wasn't one available.

And we hear this directly from EMS [emergency medical services] staff as well, that they can't transfer patients to beds in the emergency room. And we know that that's called offload delays, when ambulances and paramedics are sitting in hallways with patients for hours and hours because, as we talked about yesterday, hospitals are full. But that's not a big enough problem to warrant an emergency debate, Mr. Speaker.

We've also had Blake Turnbull, little Blake. A lot of folks will remember little Blake, on a wait-list to see a pediatric GI [gastroenterologist] here in Saskatchewan — I said gastroenterologist yesterday so after a couple of hours here it becomes harder — and was removed from the wait-list, Mr. Speaker.

And Lisa Glines, whose two daughters, Ella and Rachel, who also need access to a pediatric GI to stay healthy with regular check-ins. Those regular check-ins don't exist right now, Mr. Speaker.

With facilities that are closed and on bypass and a government that's not willing to share that information with Saskatchewan people . . . You know, there were four, four ICUs on bypass at a time when we received a leaked ICU dashboard, Mr. Speaker. That could warrant an emergency debate of the legislature. We can't take care of our most critically ill patients, you know. And I know people know about the gravity of ICUs, but when you actually hear about it, you hear a loved one you know is in ICU, it's not a good sign, Mr. Speaker. These are critically ill, critically ill patients.

But instead this government responds by shrouding things in secrecy, removing transparency. Take the website down. Send out a hush memo to health care workers in the community instead of shedding a light on these problems and working to fix them. I have lost count of the number of hush memos I've seen as Health critic, Mr. Speaker.

And we did have legislation that was passed. I first brought forward a private member's bill, and then thankfully the members opposite passed legislation right after that that would include employees of the SHA under health whistle-blower protections so that people could come forward if there was wrongdoing in the health care system.

But we still have hush memos from this government, Mr. Speaker. And it's no coincidence that the same day myself and the member for Saskatoon Eastview were in Lanigan, a hush memo was sent out to the staff at the Lanigan Hospital saying, don't talk to them; don't talk to any MLAs who might be coming through — knowing full well that we were coming through that day, Mr. Speaker. It's highly suspect and it breeds a culture of fear.

And I remember during the pandemic there was a hush memo to doctors telling them, don't put anything in the minutes that you wouldn't want to see in the newspaper. You wouldn't want to see any discordant messaging at all costs. So this government's response is just to silence, to shroud things in secrecy, when instead what we need is for them to take action. If they spent the same amount of effort putting action into solving these problems that they put into trying to shroud them beneath a complicated web of . . . something, Mr. Speaker, we would have real change in this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, we can also talk about women's health and a woman in Meadow Lake being forced to give birth on the side of the road, Kendal Carlberg. Folks will remember. And the very, highly inconsistent birth services that exist across this province where women are expected to have their babies on a clock, Mr. Speaker. You have to decide. You can't have your baby at night. You can't have your baby on a weekend. You cannot have your baby right now because we can't give you an epidural . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — You know, this has nothing to do with the bill that we're talking about. So I would like you stick with bill, if you would please.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These are the issues we're hearing about. We're not hearing about the issues that are being presented in this legislation, Mr. Speaker. And we've heard from folks in Meadow Lake, but also Moose Jaw, Creighton, Swift Current, Yorkton, Mr. Speaker. Those are the issues that are emergencies in this province. Those are emergent issues of the day. And it's not something you expect from a province like Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, there's a tremendous impact on mental health with this legislation. We can't talk about the gender pronoun policy without talking about some mental health issues. And let's talk about what this bill actually does. It makes it so the parent or guardian is a decision-maker and has access to all information on academic and disciplinary issues. There's nothing here about the student being under 16 for these. It gets parents two-week notice on sex ed course material and date, and students can opt out. Notably, this is already what happens. Schools will not use requested pronouns, name, gender identity until consent is obtained. And if physical, mental, or emotional harm is reasonably expected to result, school staff will help students develop a plan to address the request to the parent or guardian.

[16:00]

And there's a high reliance here on access to school supports, Mr. Speaker, which, we have canvassed, are not even a quarter as robust as the minister believes they are.

It uses the notwithstanding clause for *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* and for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And of course there's an indemnity clause that you can't sue the Crown, the government, the school board, or the school staff for any resulting damage, Mr. Speaker — acknowledging that there's a belief that there's going to be some resulting damage.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about what some of the mental health implications are here and the lack of supports that exist throughout the rest of the system. We talked a little bit about mental health supports within the education system, but we haven't talked that much about mental health supports that people can fall back on.

So if you can't get that counselling in school, if that school counsellor is only there for one day or a half-day a week and is serving thousands of students, if that school psychologist has a wait-list, what happens during the rest of that time where the student is waiting and where the student needs those supports?

And, Mr. Speaker, that's why we spend time talking about the mental supports, health supports that exist in community. Because this government is counting . . . If it fails in the schools or they've cut the school programming so much that it doesn't exist, then this is where we're going next, Mr. Speaker.

And there are a lot of issues here with mental health care, or lack thereof, in the province. One of the first issues that I hear a lot about is that when teenagers or kids are trying to access health care in the community, the publicly available supports are unknown and have high wait-lists. A lot of folks don't even know about the mental health services that exist in their community, because there's so little of them. And it's not like these folks even have the capacity to do the advertising, and of course this is all part of the public system.

But it is . . . The wait-lists are often so long, especially for follow-up appointments or if you're not deemed to be an emergency, Mr. Speaker. If your situation is triaged and they say you can probably wait a little bit, the wait times are so long that people are lost in the process.

You have to be able to reach people when they ask for help. People will be in a certain frame of mind at the moment when they ask for help, and it's crucial that we shorten these wait times and that we provide these services when and where they are needed, Mr. Speaker, in community.

And what we see instead, and we even see this in the public system, is families being encouraged to pay out of pocket for mental health services. And this will happen in a seemingly innocent way where an intake worker will ask the family, do you have insurance? Do you have any kind of insurance through your work? Can we get someone else to pay for this other than the government? That's their first goal. And if the answer is yes, if you have any kind of insurance, you're directed into the private route, Mr. Speaker. And members will be able to attest to this.

Folks will know this if they've accessed mental health care. That is the question you get asked: do you have insurance?

And in a lot of cases it will also be recommended that if you don't have insurance but you can afford to pay for it out of pocket, you should get out your credit card, because the wait times will be lower. You'll be able to get care faster and you'll be able to have comprehensive care that expands over long periods of time, that addresses trauma, that digs into mental health issues and the root causes of challenges. Because counselling is not a one-and-done, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And although theoretically the goal in clinical practice is to treat people as few times as possible — you know, this whole idea that people see their shrink for their whole life does not bear out in the evidence — we know that often there are times where people will rely on their counsellor for extended periods of time, and they'll get through something and they'll learn some coping tools and they'll be able to move forward. But the goal of so many of these public services that are available is to only provide a discrete number of treatments. To only provide, say, two treatments, one treatment, four treatments. Counselling sessions, I should say. And then the goal is to get people back out into community.

But there are a lot of folks that have deep trauma, and this system does not work for them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there are real challenges with the way mental health services are treated as different from health care, when we know that mental health care is health care. And it seems so obvious for me to say that, but I have conversations now with some of my constituents and people that come to our office. And I say that to them and they are relieved. And they're like, just to hear you say that means so much to me because I've always been treated like I'm different or that this issue is different.

And that's what we need to change, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We need to be able to provide these supports within a reasonable time frame, get these wait-lists down. And part of that is about addressing the big picture, health human resources, staffing complement. It's about making sure we actually have the staff, make sure we actually have the staff so that — sorry, everyone was looking behind me; I just had to . . . baby — to make sure we actually have the staff to deliver those services in the first place.

And there are competing systems within the mental health care system as well. There's incentives to leave the public system. There's pay incentives. There's hours incentives. And this is something that needs to be addressed by this government as well. And we need to get access to these counselling services.

And you know, frankly it's not a big deal to me whether it happens through the health care system or if it happens through the education system, Mr. Speaker. I don't really care which ministry takes responsibility for it, provided kids get access to counselling. Pick one and provide the services, but don't do two of them halfway. I couldn't even ask about mental health counselling in schools during committee because, oh, that's a different ministry. That's in the Ministry of Education, and we can't answer that, even though I'm the mental health critic.

Mr. Speaker, the siloing isn't helping anyone. Get together, come

up with a plan, and let's figure it out. And the plan is not the mental health and addictions plan that the minister has been talking about lately that was re-released last week. We got three pillars now instead of Pillars for Life which had four pillars. We're down from 76 pages to 10 pages of lack of concrete recommendations and action, Mr. Speaker. And we don't see real commitments. We don't see those targeted measures that we were talking about.

The importance of those targeted measures existing cannot be understated. It's about program evaluation. Are we getting out of this program what we thought we would? And if not, maybe we should redirect our resources. Because at the end of the day, governing is about choices. It's about where you decide to put your dollars, which programs you decide to bring to the table.

And instead of bringing forward a program that people have quite loudly opposed at this point, that we have a human rights commissioner resigning because of, instead of bringing forward this program that tramples on the rights of trans and gender-diverse kids, they could be bringing forward a program that takes meaningful action, that provides these wraparound supports for our youth, that tackles our youth suicide rates, Mr. Speaker.

And I know my colleague from Cumberland . . . I won't mention anything about his presence, but I know my colleague from Cumberland has grown so exhausted of trying to bring these issues forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it's an honour to serve in his wake, with how much commitment he has spent trying to get access to services for teens, for kids, who are dying by suicide in the North, where we know that the rate is so much higher, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we know for Indigenous kids, the rate is so much higher for suicide. And these are huge issues that we need to tackle.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's been two years since the passing of that legislation. And I want to thank Tristen Durocher for his work in raising awareness of the lack of a suicide plan from this government. I truly appreciate all the work that he put in, you know, walking 635 kilometres from Air Ronge to where we stand today, Mr. Speaker. And Chris Merasty on that walk. You know, members will remember Walking with Our Angels in 2020.

And I remember councillor Devin Bernatchez joined us as well to talk about the ongoing suicide crisis and the tragic loss of his cousin to suicide, and all of these folks pointing out the shortage of mental health and addictions resources, particularly in northern communities.

And at that time they called on this government to pass my colleague from Cumberland's bill, the suicide prevention Act. And I remember the Premier . . . Well their response was to take them to court. Get off our lawn, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they finally passed this bill, the suicide prevention Act, but it took us three separate attempts and nearly three years to do so before this government finally agreed.

And in the years since, we've asked them repeatedly. This is your legislation. It says you need to consult with people. It says you need to create a meaningful suicide prevention strategy. You know, you were supposed to do those consultations within the first 30 days, 90 days — I don't have it in front of me. It's been years. What has happened here?

And then we get the runaround from this government. We get them talking about Pillars for Life. Well Pillars for Life came out before you passed the suicide prevention Act, and it was widely criticized for not being enough, for not having concrete actions.

And there's so much more work to do on this front, Mr. Speaker, and we know that because we still have kids dying by suicide. It's still the leading cause of death for teenagers in Saskatchewan. You know, kids under 20, kids under 20 years old, that is how they're most likely to die, Mr. Speaker. If that's not an emergency, I don't know what is. If that doesn't demonstrate to this government that those supports don't exist in communities, I don't know what does.

I don't know how to reason with them at this point, Mr. Speaker, because it defies logic. It defies compassion. It's completely unclear to me what is going to push them into acting.

[16:15]

And it wasn't the Provincial Auditor. The Provincial Auditor put it in a report in 2023, volume 1, Mr. Speaker. This report, chapter 20, "Saskatchewan Health Authority — Treating Patients at Risk of Suicide in Northwest Saskatchewan." So this was a particular study that was brought about by too many people. One life is too many but a disturbing trend amongst youth in northwest Saskatchewan. And the Provincial Auditor followed up to say, you know, did you work on our recommendations? And the results are really disturbing, Mr. Speaker. These recommendations came out in 2019. This is about the mental health of our kids. This is about suicide prevention, Mr. Speaker. 2019 these recommendations came out. So four years prior to the auditor's follow-up.

Two out of eight of the recommendations were complete, a quarter. I can reduce fractions. That's how much attention this government has put on this, 25 per cent of the recommendations. That's how much this government values our youth, and in northwest Saskatchewan, primarily our Indigenous youth, Mr. Speaker. That's the value they're placing on this.

So when they talk about investments, investments mean nothing to the families who have lost these kids, that are forever changed because of those losses, or who are forever asking whether there was more they could have done to help in the situation. Could they have advocated for more resources? They are the government. They hold the purse strings. They can fix this. They have a responsibility to fix this. I'll appeal to their sense of moral responsibility, that kids are dying by suicide, kids are hopeless under this government's watch. And none of them are listening, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

These weren't outrageously large requests that were in the Provincial Auditor's report, either. I'll highlight some of them. I'll quote from the report:

The Authority needs to conduct further work in the following key areas:

Formally analyze key data about suicide rates and prevalence of suicide attempts to rationalize services available to patients at risk of suicide. Reviewing trends and documenting analysis of key data can inform the

planning and implementation of treatment programs.

Analyze your data. All right.

Conduct suicide screening of all patients to ensure psychiatric evaluations for emergency department patients at risk of suicide occur prior to discharge. This helps ensure patients receive needed support and treatment.

Do a suicide risk assessment. Okay. Needs to happen prior to the person being discharged, so when they're already in your care.

Consistently follow up with parents of at risk . . .

Sorry. I started reading two things are the same time.

Consistently follow up with parents at risk of suicide after emergency department discharge . . .

Patients. I'm sorry. That's why this wasn't making sense.

Consistently follow up with patients at risk of suicide after emergency department discharge to encourage treatment where needed.

Follow up with someone who came to the emergency room who is at risk of suicide. It's not a tall order, Mr. Speaker.

Analyze reasons why patients at risk of suicide do not attend their scheduled appointments.

Find out why people don't come for their scheduled appointments.

Centrally track training that's completed by staff.

Mr. Speaker, these are not insurmountable. You know, these are steps on a checklist.

The auditor also noted that "Saskatchewan's three-year average rate of 17.9 suicides per 100,000 population is significantly higher than the Canadian average of 11.5 suicides for the same period." Our rate of suicides is significantly higher than average, Mr. Speaker.

I raise the fact that there isn't this system for tracking, that key cases might be missed, that patients are not being screened for suicide, Mr. Speaker, to show that we have some good work. We have some good reports that have been done. And the member from Saskatoon Eastview talked about a really good report that was done by the child advocate as well.

We have these reports that have been done. And instead of taking the advice of people who have dug into this — people who have looked at comparing us to other jurisdictions, what we can feasibly do — instead of taking that advice, what do we hear the government saying all the time? I'll take no advice. It's irresponsible, Mr. Speaker, and it's no way to govern.

I could talk about all the different ways . . . I can hear the members opposite disliking my sighing, but that's how I feel right now. I feel like sighing. That's what I'm going to give you.

Instead of them taking these issues seriously, the issues of suicide and overdose and harm reduction — there's interlinkages between all of these issues — we treat them as siloed issues, Mr. Speaker. But Bee, the child that died by suicide, who was gender-diverse, they also struggled with addiction issues at 14, Mr. Speaker. And we have talked time and time again about the work that needs to happen on the harm reduction front and it falls on deaf ears by this government, Mr. Speaker.

I asked over and over again last year what this government was doing to limit the number of overdoses, the record number of overdoses. And what do we hear, Mr. Speaker? They're not following the evidence. They're not listening to the medical students who have put together some very impressive stats for us, who have pulled it all together in a simple, digestible way for the benefit of this province.

You know, community folks that came forward. We had folks from Prairie Harm Reduction, the Nēwo-Yôtina Friendship Centre, AIDS Programs South Sask, that came to this Assembly with the medical students, Students for Harm Reduction and Informed Policy. I think that's their acronym, SHRIP. They clearly demonstrated the efficacy, the argument. They even provided a financial argument, Mr. Speaker.

They talked about intranasal naloxone and how it can save lives, how it's easier to administer. It's less scary than having to break a vial and put a needle in someone, Mr. Speaker. And we asked the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions for weeks why he wasn't taking action on this, and we got no good answer. We got no good answer. He talked about the, you know, the pilot projects of naloxone. You know, he was talking about the injection naloxone. And now we see nothing. We haven't seen an announcement from him, and it's been months.

The Deputy Speaker: — You know, I guess I've said it before, but you're straying away from the actual bill. Really, this 137 is the bill that we should be talking on, and you're straying away from that by quite a long way. So if you could please stick closer to the bill.

Ms. Mowat: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I can clearly demonstrate how this directly relates to the bill.

Bee is a child who died by suicide. Their mother was here last week. This was a gender-diverse child who did not have the supports they needed in schools, who did not have the supports they needed in community, and I'm talking about the lack of those supports, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This bill assumes that those supports are available, and I am making a case for how those supports are not available. So I would submit that we're right on track here.

Mr. Speaker, the child advocate does talk about this bill and talks about the crisis that exists in kids' mental health services. And when she released the *Desperately Waiting* report she highlighted that there was a crisis point, that these are decades-old issues, that things have eroded and been cut back so drastically that kids don't have these supports. They can't access mental health and addiction services when they need them. Those supports do not exist.

She created this comprehensive report, and she talked about the

fact that this was about desperately waiting. After decades of the same issues we cannot expect outcomes to change without significant investments and for the system to immediately prioritize the well-being of children. And there were 14 recommendations here, Mr. Speaker. She highlighted the fact that suicide is the second-leading cause of death among youth and young adults in the country; that Indigenous boys are 29 times more likely to die by suicide; Indigenous girls are six times more likely than the general population; and until young people have full and effective access to preventive mental health and addiction services, their well-being will continue to suffer.

And finally, she highlighted something that is incredibly critical, that there are some supports that exist for kids in community but it's only once you get to a crisis point. It's only once you're at the point where you can be admitted and you go into the institution, Mr. Speaker, but that there are severe gaps that exist for everyone else who's struggling with mental health, you know, struggling with these identity issues. These supports are not there, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation assumes those supports are there. Those supports are not there, so then what? Where do these kids go? I could probably talk about mental health supports all day as well, but I hear you loud and clear. I will keep moving through my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

We talked a little bit about what the bill does here, Mr. Speaker. And I think one piece of it that's not getting very much attention, but very much deserves some attention here, is the issue of sexual health education. And as part of this policy that was announced, and this legislation here continues it, third-party organizations aren't able to present sexual health materials in schools.

And I want to talk about some of the consequences of this change, which really seems to be not well thought out, Mr. Speaker, in the way that this has been unilaterally applied sort of at the snap of a minister's fingers, and to look at what some of the implications have been here.

So this article was from the *StarPhoenix* on October 13th, 2023. It's called "Sask sexual assault centres banned from classrooms under new government policy." And I'll read from the article:

For nearly two decades, the Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre has been visiting schools throughout the city, teaching thousands of students about consent, boundaries, and bodily autonomy. "No is no, and your body is yours," said Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre executive director Reagan Conway, describing the most essential lessons her organization teaches.

[16:30]

And I wonder if members opposite thought through this piece before they put this policy in place. But they didn't take the time to consult, so your guess is as good as mine.

It is to be respected and you own that and nobody else can tell you what to do with it.

No means no. Seems like a good lesson for people to be learning in schools, Mr. Speaker.

Through these presentations Conway said, there are often students in the audience who learn that something that happened to them or is currently happening to them is sexual assault and are then able to speak out and get help.

When the Saskatchewan government's new education policies were announced at the end of August, sexual assault prevention advocates throughout the province were horrified to learn that they were "falling under the umbrella of third-party sex educators who are now banned from classroom visits."

"Children have a right to learn about this, to keep themselves safe" said Conway. "By not allowing sexual assault centres into schools, we are doing a disservice to kids and we are putting them at risk."

Amber Stewart, executive director of the Battlefords & Area Sexual Assault Centre, BASAC, said it's a "dangerous policy" particularly in light of the high rates of gender-based violence and child sexual abuse in Saskatchewan. "We are trying to give children and youth the tools that they need to keep themselves safe, tools to let them know that they have a voice," Stewart said. "By banning us from doing that, you're taking away their voice. They're not having an opportunity to reach out for help because they're not given the information that this isn't okay."

In a prepared statement [which is becoming more and more common — just talk to the media folks] the Government of Saskatchewan said it has a process to review and recommend resources that support sexual health education and "concerns regarding third-party organizations presenting sexual health material in the classrooms will be looked at through the regulatory process."

Sounds like they didn't think it through.

Conway said the decision to ban sexual assault centres from presenting in schools is fundamentally counterproductive. "I don't think we need to be pitting education against parental rights," she said "I don't know any parent who doesn't want their child to learn and understand what good touch/bad touch is or what sexual assault is. I don't know any parent who doesn't want their child to have this kind of information so they can protect themselves or be able to say no or be able to go to their parents and say this happened to me."

In all her years of sexual violence prevention education she has "never had to pull their kid out" of BASAC's visit to the school, Stewart said. Some parents call the centre to find out more after they read an introductory letter that was sent home [this already happens] with the student before the classroom visit, but the organization was always happy to answer the questions, Stewart said.

We've had nothing but positive feedback from parents, from students, and from teachers.

Now sexual assault centres like BASAC feel "under attack" by the new policy, she said.

We've been in the battle for 43 years, advocating for sexual violence survivors and doing education and raising awareness and trying to remove the stigma on sexual assault survivors. And it just feels like we've taken steps 20 or 30 years back, and we're having to fight that fight all over again.

And all of this really begs the question, was this an intended aspect of the policy, Mr. Speaker?

And I want to talk about this clause of the bill as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there are some really important things that are facing kids today, and there is some really important work that is happening with these third-party organizations, Mr. Speaker. As we've already highlighted, Saskatchewan has some of the worst rates of domestic violence. This is something the member from Regina Douglas Park has been championing for years with her work and advocates in the community to try to improve this. Mr. Speaker, this policy flies in the face of those advocacy efforts.

Our rates of HIV/AIDS [human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome] are over double the rest of Canada, Mr. Speaker. Sexual health education is a crucial component to that. As much as we'd like to cross our fingers and hope for abstinence, I think we know better, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have a syphilis epidemic. Our teen pregnancy rates, Mr. Speaker. You would think that sexual violence and sexual health education would both be things that this government would be actively working to promote, but they're making all these snap decisions. They're doing it without consultations, Mr. Speaker. I really hope this was an unintended side effect, Mr. Speaker, but I won't give them that credit. I'd like to see them backtrack and figure this out and sort this out before more damage is done to the health and safety of our children.

This policy flies in the face ... well we're using the notwithstanding clause so let's talk about that. I remember being really proud when I learned about the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms when I was growing up. Being a little baby in late 1985, I was lucky to have the Charter in place before I was born, Mr. Speaker. And I remember learning about it in grade school and feeling protected by my society and feeling protected by my governments and perhaps naively thinking that this meant that I was going to feel safe and that kids across our country were also going to feel safe.

And I know my colleague from Saskatoon Eastview, he talked about the protections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the freedom of expression and the right to equality, and we know that the Charter forms part of our Constitution. This is deeply held values of what we believe in as Canadians.

And I think that's one of the challenges that this government is facing. That's why this is an uphill battle for them. That's why they have their 4 per cent supporters of using this notwithstanding clause here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because people know that challenging the Charter is serious business. Because these values run deep. And even with new Canadians, these are values that are taught, that are shared, that are adopted, Mr. Speaker. You know, whether this Charter existed when you were a baby, or for most folks here, probably not. It was developed over time. There's probably positive associations with that and values about who we are as a society. Because it's a

value statement at the end of the day. It's what distinguishes us. It's a foundation of our democracy.

And when you come at Charter rights, that is why people will have a visceral reaction, Mr. Speaker, because this is part of who we are. These are deeply held beliefs and entrenched in law, and that's what's so important about them. And honestly, getting all the provinces to agree to something with the federal government, like that was most of what my political studies education was about. It was about how hard it is to get everyone to agree to something, all the times that that has failed. You know, it is monumental when we get something that we can agree on like this.

And *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*. You know, this law is used to further protect our rights and promote them in Saskatchewan. It highlights the fact that discrimination is unfair and that we can't be discriminated against based on our gender identity. These are prohibited grounds, not sometimes or when the government feels like it, Mr. Speaker. And we already talked about when gender identity was added, and you know, thank the Minister of Advanced Education for his role on that. And I really do hope that he speaks to what has changed in his view here, about why the notwithstanding clause should be used here after he was instrumental in bringing it in, Mr. Speaker.

And I remember learning about using the notwithstanding clause. And it's probably because I was a political studies minor in university that a lot of this sunk in, because I know a lot of the things I learned when I was growing up, I have sadly forgotten many of them from high school, from grade school. I find there's only so much room in my head for certain things. That's not the kind of brain I have. But I do very distinctly remember learning about the notwithstanding clause and the reasons that it was brought into the Charter and really why it needs to exist. And it was sort of seen as, it wasn't people's first choice, you know; it was sort of a compromise. And it certainly wasn't meant to be used in this way.

And I hear members opposite, and this is just bonkers to me, but members opposite referring to Allan Blakeney and talking about him with the notwithstanding clause. Like I don't know how many times I'm going to use the word "head-scratcher" today but, Mr. Speaker, that's not what Allan Blakeney intended with the notwithstanding clause. And his wife, Anne, is still alive, and I assure you if any of you have the gall to call her up and ask her that, that's not what she's going to say.

It's nice to hear . . . It's nice to hear . . . It's nice to hear the Minister for Advanced Education talking so I'll invite him into the debate here. I would really like to hear from him.

Mr. Speaker, here's the problem with using the notwithstanding clause. People are very concerned about the fact that minority rights are what are being trampled on here, yet minority rights are what the Charter is supposed to protect. People are asking, what is next? If they get away with this, what is next? Whose rights are next, Mr. Speaker? If you don't agree with them politically, maybe your rights are next. And I'm getting calls and concerns from so many different groups whose Charter rights are supposed to be protected.

But, Mr. Speaker, this flies in the face of the Charter and the

human rights code. That precedent is what people are concerned about here. They're concerned about the harm and they're concerned about the precedent.

And this seemed to come out of nowhere. That's what the SSBA said. They said this policy comes out of nowhere. So what that tells me is that these rights could . . . the trampling of rights in any area could come out of nowhere on the whim of a minister. Snap your fingers after you get seven letters and let's trample on some more rights, Mr. Speaker. That is what people are concerned about here.

And it doesn't even have to be issues that come out of nowhere. It can be issues that we know those members are opposed to, like reproductive rights, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which we spent a lot of time talking about in this Chamber. Another one of those issues that I don't understand why we have to talk about so much in 2023, Mr. Speaker.

But we know how this Premier feels about abortion. We had an anti-choice group endorsing him during his leadership run, right now — very easy to look up if anyone's interested — endorsing him for his stance on abortion. He was very public about it, Mr. Speaker. This was public information. We know how he feels.

And we know that the US Supreme Court decision to roll back *Roe v. Wade* shows us that this fight is not over. Whose rights are next? That's what this is about. It's directly related to the bill and the trampling of rights. This isn't just a fight that we're seeing in the US.

The government has been very clear about their positions here, Mr. Speaker, and it's very concerning. And some members opposite might disagree. And I would encourage those members to stand up and speak to this motion and tell us which rights they're going to trample on and which rights they're not going to trample on. That's what I would like to hear, Mr. Speaker, because "just trust us" isn't going very well right now. People don't trust that they will . . . People do not trust that this government is not going to trample on their rights, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds of protesters outside on Tuesday. Many of the signs read, what's next, who's next, am I next. This is a very real concern we are hearing.

[16:45]

They're not working to ensure access to abortion, and in fact several cabinet ministers are anti-choice. We now have a Minister of Justice who has publicly stated that she's anti-choice. The Minister of Justice, that's the person at the centre of law-making, Mr. Speaker. How are we supposed to believe that reproductive rights are not next? You convince me of that, that reproductive rights are not next on the trampling block, Mr. Speaker.

I'm 37 years old. I thought that these would always be available to me in my province. I thought I would never have to have this conversation, and I thought these were issues that were fought by first- and second-wave feminism, maybe third-wave feminism, Mr. Speaker. But I have had to spend a disturbing amount of time talking about the reproductive rights of women in this Assembly, working to make sure that we got access to Mifegymiso, Mr. Speaker, which the then minister of Rural and Remote Health,

member for Yorkton, said he would do everything in his professional capacity to prevent, Mr. Speaker. People are concerned about this government trampling on rights. They are asking, what is next?

Mr. Speaker, one of the central things I want to talk about with this legislation is the mental health of trans and gender-diverse kids. I'm really curious. We were talking about what members opposite, what conversations they've had this summer. What issues have been brought forward to them? How many of them have heard from constituents that their biggest concern is gender pronouns in schools? But I also wonder how many people in the trans community members have interacted with.

And I know that's going to look different for every person based on where they live and who their constituents are, Mr. Speaker. But I think understanding the perspective of a kid who is in this situation, who's questioning their identity, who doesn't have those supports, is incredibly important. Because I've had a lot of conversations with folks from the trans community, and a lot of folks have talked to me because I'm the Health critic over the years. I've heard about some barriers that exist in health care but also, you know, we talked about identification. There are some things that seem very basic and are taken for granted for those of us who don't live in this world.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for trans and gender-diverse kids and adults, these are very real challenges that exist for them, and they have more barriers than the rest of us do. And I've brought some of those issues forward to the Assembly before. And I've heard loud and clear about some of these barriers, about some of the barriers to accessing both physical and mental health care because of course there are some practitioners that won't treat them. And these folks provide a very different reality on this situation that the government hasn't considered in my submission.

And I heard the member from Meewasin talking about this actually when he was commenting on the rule change earlier, about this distinct perspective, and I think it bears repeating. And I think the first piece, the first assumption that needs to be challenged, Mr. Speaker, is that it's not a preference for these folks. It makes them genuinely uncomfortable and upset when their incorrect names or pronouns are used, and that's the first key tenet to think about. The big concern, the reason why we have kids protesting, we have people on the steps, Mr. Speaker, these policies could cause kids to stay in the closet; it pushes them back into the closet with all of the advances we've had, Mr. Speaker. And that's what I'll spend some time talking about.

We know that trans kids have higher rates of homelessness, especially from being kicked out. And it's a sad situation there are many added barriers for gender-diverse kids who are then looking for housing. Some will avoid accessing shelters because that will put them in an awkward position. They might have fears about being treated negatively because of their gender identity. It's an added layer of barriers. That's hard for cisgender people to understand. It leads to more homelessness and housing insecurity. And we talked a lot today about homelessness and how big of a problem it is. This government can't afford to make it worse.

And I do want to provide a huge thank you to, you know, the

good folks at the John Howard Society Regina and Lulu's Lodge for the role that they're playing here in providing housing for kids who desperately need it. And I found an article. We had them join us the other day and they were introduced by the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre, but I also found an article from 2020 in the *Leader-Post* that's entitled, "Lulu's Lodge provides safe space for Regina LGBTQ2S youth facing homelessness."

It details why Lulu's Lodge is needed, because many of the youth who come there have to leave their own home because they're not accepted for who they are. "We've had people actually flee a home before because it was unsafe, said Tanna Young, the director of Lulu's Lodge." And they're full. At the time they were at 90 per cent capacity because they're needed. They haven't had government funding. They've relied on community. And Terry Vanmackelberg, who performs as Flo Mingo, has been a dedicated supporter of Lulu's Lodge.

If I would have come out of the closet as a youth, I would have been homeless as well and on the streets, and there was no Lulu's Lodge back then. And just because of your gender, your sexuality, how you identify should not put you on the streets, and you should not be forced to live on the streets because of who you are, said Vanmackelberg.

And I know we've had members from both sides of this Assembly stand up and do member statements and participate in the fundraisers religiously and dress up in drag, despite the fact that maybe that wasn't their, you know, they're not everyday performers, to raise money and to talk about the good cause here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They've shown that this is a valued service that's required in our society.

And these actions fly in stark contrast to this policy that exists here today, Mr. Speaker, which threatens to put more trans youth on the streets. At minimum, put some government funding into this home because it's going to be more needed if we're passing this bill. Mr. Speaker, we know that trans youth have higher rates of homelessness. We also know that trans youth have higher rates of suicide, and this is the reason I was talking so much about suicide earlier. This is of both attempting suicide and contemplating suicide. And we also know the evidence bears out it is worse when trans kids don't feel supported, if they don't feel accepted. We cannot be putting kids at risk of violence. The government is supposed to protect our kids, not put them at risk.

I want to draw the Assembly's attention to the Trans Sask report entitled *So They Know We're Here*, which is from December 2022. Trans Sask was founded in 2011 and incorporated in 2012, for folks who don't know, and it has a history of facilitating social change. And it talks about the work that it's doing with two-spirit, trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming individuals, so it uses the abbreviation 2STNBGN. It says this work is led by community and has taken place with academics, community, and non-profit organizations.

And they ran a survey of trans folks in Saskatchewan because they said, you know, we don't have the data. We want to be able to have that data. Let's do our own survey. And this, you know, involved academics. It had a good sample number, Mr. Speaker. It provided a ton of information about the trans community in our province, so it's definitely worth a read if folks are interested. It provides a ton of detail about all of the barriers that exist, but it

also has a really positive . . . It presents things in a positive light, which is also nice.

In this report, they point to some important findings about mental health:

Trans and nonbinary people in Canada experience high rates of social isolation, in part due to constantly monitoring our safety and potential social rejection, even during small talk . . . Our research found that social isolation results in high levels of social avoidance, depression, anxiety, and not feeling understood.

But there is some hope: “. . . our overall mental health improves when we are accepted.” They go on to talk about the importance of affirming environments and positive environments and how important these are, the importance of social connections, feelings of belonging and recognition, and they tied this to the importance of using people’s proper pronouns and inclusive language in social settings.

Let’s look at some hard numbers on mental health. Their survey found that 68 per cent of their respondents experienced anxiety, which is about 43 per cent higher than the general population. They also found higher rates of major depression, diagnosed major depression, at 53 per cent, which is 34 per cent higher than the general population. This is also true for PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], borderline personality disorder, eating disorders, and body dysphoria. Their survey also confirms the findings of other research that suicidal ideations and rates of self-harm are much higher than that of the general population.

These numbers are particularly alarming considering the wait times for mental health care and the added barriers to accessing that care for trans youth. And, Mr. Speaker, this is why we have people protesting. This is why we have people up in the galleries. This is why we have a Saskatchewan Human Rights Commissioner resigning.

And published yesterday in the *Leader-Post*, “Sask human rights commissioner resigns over school pronoun policy”:

“This is not something I can be a part of, and I will not be associated with a provincial government that takes away the rights of children, especially vulnerable children.”

A Saskatchewan Human Rights Commissioner has resigned following the provincial government’s decision to utilize the notwithstanding clause and pass a policy mandating teachers attain parental consent before using a student’s preferred name and pronouns at school.

In a letter announcing her resignation effective immediately, Heather Kuttai — one of six Human Rights Commissioners in Saskatchewan — said the decision did not come lightly to her. But to her, the policy itself is “an attack on the rights of trans, nonbinary, and gender-diverse children.

“A child’s rights must always take precedence over a parent’s obligations and responsibilities,” said Kuttai. “My first concern is that this (bill) is going to hurt kids.”

Speaking shortly after submitting her resignation, Kuttai said it was a hard letter to write: “What drove me to this is, that my husband and I have a kid who’s trans.” Regardless of that connection, she said it would have been the policy, but “being a parent makes it a bigger issue for us.”

Kuttai said she remembers seeing her son struggle, seeing how he wrestled with coming out, even though he thought his parents would be supportive.

“I can’t be a good citizen of this province, I can’t be a commissioner that defends human rights, I can’t be the mother — a good mother — to a trans kid if I just sit by and let this happen,” said Kuttai.

Kuttai was appointed to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in 2014. According to the SHRC she is an author, disability advocate, and human rights activist.

When it came to supporting her son as he changed his name and came out as transgender, Kuttai said, “It came down to a life-and-death decision. I don’t want to be scared about him not wanting to be around in the world anymore. You choose your child above all things,” she said.

Mr. Speaker, she took a brave and principled stand here. And I think it’s worth the government pausing to think about what they’re doing. We have Justice Megaw — and my colleague spent quite a bit of time going through the 50-page decision earlier, so I won’t do that — but we have Justice Megaw talking about how this policy does irreparable harm to children and addresses the most minority of minority. And that’s what the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the human rights code is here to protect is our minorities, Mr. Speaker. And it flies in the face of that.

We have the Children’s Advocate, whose role is to speak for kids, leads a team of professionals to advocate for the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth in Saskatchewan, an independent officer of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, which means something or should mean something to the members opposite. And the Children’s Advocate is concerned. And again my colleague spent a lot of time on the Children’s Advocate report, so I won’t go through that page by page for repetition here, for the sake of repetition, Mr. Speaker. But what I’ll say . . . Yeah, my colleagues are encouraging me to do it anyway.

The Children’s Advocate is concerned that 94 per cent of Saskatchewan transgender kids surveyed said they have had mental health issues lasting a year or more, while two-thirds have contemplated suicide. Two-thirds of our trans youth have contemplated suicide. They are at even higher risk than the general population, and their lives matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they were here today for my colleagues to point out. Some of them still are here today and have spent the afternoon with us, Mr. Speaker.

And it’s just incredibly disappointing to see this government not listening to people, trampling on the rights of kids. I did not think I would see this day, honestly. And they refuse to hear from the public. They refuse to do consultation, Mr. Speaker, making a decision after seven letters from parents, maybe 18 total. That’s what the public record says. They say tens of thousands; you

decide who they should believe. Ramming through this legislation on a special sitting of the Assembly, not allowing the usual process.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about what the usual process looks like. Typically we see the Throne Speech. We have bills introduced in the fall. We have the whole winter to talk to stakeholders, to do that important work. You know, how it happens on our side of the House is the critics are, you know, assigned a particular bill that coincides with the minister who presented it, which sadly means that the critic for Justice ends up having a whole bunch of bills sitting on her plate.

And we take these bills and we go back to our stakeholders. We talk to community. We go back to all those relationships we've built over time and we say, hey, you know, the government says you're asking for this. Is that the case? Tell me a little bit more about it. And we have that important time and they tell us what they're looking for and we do our best to advocate for people who sometimes don't feel comfortable advocating for themselves publicly.

And that's our normal process. And we have the debate in the legislature. And we have time for the bill to be in front of the whole — the public. We have time. We have time for the media to engage. We have time for the public consultation.

And normally during this process we get constituents that will contact our office and say, I know this bill is before the Assembly and as my representative here's what I'd like you to say about it. And I really appreciate when my colleagues give me water, but I also really appreciate when constituents come forward and talk about the legislation that's before this Assembly. And that's an important part of this process.

And I remember . . . I don't know the exact number of the Act — perhaps the former Health minister will have it or Justice minister — but there was an emergency planning Act that was before the Assembly during COVID. And the whole premise of the Act was that it was an emergency. That bill still followed the normal process, Mr. Speaker. It still followed the normal process. You know, there wasn't even a, hey guys, could you pass this quickly, could we figure this out, kind of thing. It was . . . It's astonishing, Mr. Speaker, for them to step outside of the normal process for this legislation that they have not consulted on.

And we just saw the bill on Thursday afternoon. It's hard to believe because it's been . . . kind of feels like it's been a few weeks since Thursday afternoon, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the fact that maybe some of the members opposite are kind of done listening to me, but we have a whole bunch of other folks who have been saying things. And since you won't do the consultation, I'll bring the consultation forward to this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

So who would we like to hear from? Well we got some groans from this earlier so maybe I'll bring us back to Murray Mandryk. I was hoping for another groan, Mr. Speaker, but we didn't get one.

An Hon. Member: — No, you got one at the back.

Ms. Mowat: — Oh. Murray said:

What's been obvious since Premier Scott Moe declared he intends to go to war over the pronoun policy in schools is that this has been a policy driven by its political popularity.

And then another:

There's even smaller but exceedingly vocal segment — or at least, they've been vocal at rallies or on social media, sharing their conspiratorial beliefs — who remain thoroughly convinced that pedophiles are preying upon kids by not-so-secretly encouraging gender transformation through surgery or other means.

The problem with Moe's government going all in with legislation, court challenges, and the notwithstanding clause is that it's becoming increasingly hard to distinguish whether it is advocating for the rights of ordinary parents or the lunatic fringe who now seem the most pleased with what Moe is doing.

Mr. Speaker, those are some big words — “lunatic fringe.” I'd like to hear what the Premier has to say about that. And then we've got the editorial board from *The Globe and Mail*:

What could be so urgent? Is freedom of religion involved? Or speech? Has a language law been struck down? No. A judge temporarily suspended a new policy that would require parental consent before children under 16 could change their pronoun at school. For that, the legislature is being recalled early. For that, the notwithstanding clause is being brandished — for policies that put youths in psychological or even physical harm, that could force them out of school, out of their homes, and onto the street.

They go on to say:

Yet Mr. Moe's Sask Party government, mimicking regulations imposed in New Brunswick, saw a handful of vulnerable students as such a great problem that it slapped together new regulations in August in five short days.

This is what people are saying about us, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Also from Murray Mandryk, this time on the 12th. He's written a little about this. Actually he's been following it pretty closely. “Government ramming through pronoun bill in bad faith.”

So far no Saskatchewan Party government MLA nor anyone else has produced one single parent who was kept in the dark about a child's pronouns or name preference used in a classroom. Premier Scott Moe and Health Minister Everett Hindley have said they have never encountered such a situation.

He goes on to say that the Education minister “smugly ducked the most critical question that is now holding up all other business of the legislature.” Hmm. We're not off to a good start here, Mr. Speaker.

Consider what else could and should be debated in the legislative Chamber right now. How about the closure of nursing homes? [This is still a quote, Mr. Speaker.] Hiring more doctors and nurses, providing much needed provincial sales tax breaks for ordinary folks hammered by inflation,

or how about a PST break for home builders. How about a roof for those Saskatchewan parents who literally saw their roof, school roof, cave in. [How about a roof, Mr. Deputy Speaker.] Right now the legislature isn't doing the people's business.

Mandryk goes on to talk about "Parents' rights bill ignores tragedy of some parents," and details Bee and their tragic suicide.

Simon Enoch in the *Leader-Post*: "Sask Party government uses wedge issue to undermine teachers."

Many in the province, including the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, have rightly asked why the Scott Moe government is pursuing its so-called parental rights agenda with such fervour and disregard for expert opinion.

And there's pages and pages, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of issues and people speaking out about this. There's an article in the *Leader-Post*: "Hundreds rally in Regina against new Saskatchewan pronoun policy."

Show Up for Saskatchewan's Trans Youth, a collective of trans and queer activists, advocates, and educators, organized Saturday's rally in Regina to call on the province to rescind its new policy. In a statement, the collective condemned the policy, calling it violently anti-trans and anti-youth.

And it talks about how people were shocked, concerned, and scared, Mr. Speaker.

And there has been so much media and, Mr. Speaker, I'll say, I'm not seeing a glowing, positive review anywhere, you know. And you might say, well you're biased. You're only looking for the critique. Mr. Speaker, I've said I will take in new information. I will make new judgments if you provide me with a good reason for what we are doing, if you provide me with a rationale, a justification. But it's not here. It's not here.

Another *Leader-Post* article: "Relying on school supports for pronoun policy fallout not viable, says STF." This is Larissa Kurz:

Saskatchewan's teachers' union says it's unrealistic to expect schools to provide supports for LGBTQ+ students ousted by this ministry's new pronoun policy.

It goes on to say:

He said there are "robust supports in schools all around the province" to do so, and that the ministry intends to include that consideration in planning implementation deals with school divisions.

It "sounds great in theory," said the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation president Samantha Becotte, in response. "When we look at the realities that we see in schools, those things are not aligning," she said.

[17:15]

Becotte said the current ratio in Saskatchewan averages one

counsellor to every three . . . [How many students do you think it is? 300?] . . . 3,000 [one counsellor to every 3,000 students], a staffing level she asserts is not enough to deliver the help that the Education minister said is the intent of the new policy.

An ample number of students, but not an ample number of counsellors.

"We don't have supports for students who are already struggling and now we're going to have additional struggles for in our school for some very vulnerable students," she said.

And then Tamara Hinz is quoted in this article:

She said, "mental health services, especially for children, are woefully under-resourced across the province, with the current wait-list to get in to a child psychiatrist at a minimum of . . . [How long do we think it is?] . . . two years. [A minimum of two years. The supports are not there, Mr. Speaker.] I've been working with school-aged kids for 10 years now, and I've seen over time school-based counselling positions cut further and further back to the point where they're almost non-existent," she said.

But the Education minister says there are ample supports. Who do we believe? Who do we believe, Mr. Speaker?

I talked a little bit about how I wasn't going to spend that much time on the child advocate's report, but I do want to say a couple of things here, Mr. Speaker. This is the report from September 2023 that I'm referring to, *Review of Ministry of Education Policy: Use of Preferred First Name and Pronouns for Students*.

Children and youth have the same human rights as all people. These are, however, additionally guaranteed special protections under the UNCRC because of their age and limited ability to participate in political processes. [She also said] The stated intent of the policy is to outline the steps to be taken to support students who wish to change their pronouns.

Mr. Speaker, there are pages and pages here. I'm just going to see if there's anything I wanted to highlight, because my colleague did such a good job of going through this.

I wanted to talk a little bit about accessibility of professional supports and the confirmation here about the lack of sufficient counsellors and elders in schools, which again was part of *Desperately Waiting*. And as I mentioned in question period today, something that we've heard the need for by professional after professional, report after report, is the need for these resources in a timely fashion, Mr. Speaker. And these things need to be taken seriously.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to highlight . . . You know, maybe you can say, well I don't want to listen to the member opposite. I don't want to learn anything from her, or whatever their phrase is. But maybe you'll listen to the people of the province.

And I do have a few letters that I want to read into the record here, Mr. Speaker. And if the government isn't going to do the

consultation with the people of this province, we will do that work. We are not afraid of doing that work. We are not afraid of the information we're going to receive from the citizens of this province. We will continue to put that work in until the job is done, Mr. Speaker.

So I want to highlight a few different, a few different letters here. And I want to start by this letter that's from a family resident physician. And I've got a few letters from health care professionals here, Mr. Speaker, in my role as Health critic.

It says:

Dear members of the Saskatchewan government:

Thank you for asking us to share some statements regarding the policy. I'm a resident of Saskatchewan, cisgender, parent, mother, and family medicine resident physician in the province. My pronouns are she/her.

Premier Moe has been quoted in the media recently stating that wide consultation went out into developing this policy. I request that Premier Moe provide all necessary information and evidence of the consultation process.

As a parent in the province, I was not consulted. I am dismayed, angry, and appalled by the Premier's development of this policy in the first place, and absolutely disgusted by his claims to use the notwithstanding clause to override Justice Michael Megaw's injunction of this policy.

Premier Moe, you did not consult the parents of this province, and frankly you did not consult the children, teenagers, and young adults that this policy directly impacts. Our youth, every youth of this province, matters so much.

Our queer, trans, and nonbinary, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth know themselves better than anyone else — more than their parents, more than your government. And our jobs as entrusted adults in this world is to let our youth confidently and authentically be themselves without prejudice, without parental consent, without government consent.

This policy impacts me. It makes me ashamed of our province. I am a doctor in this province, and this policy impacts my practice and my patients. I have cared for many youth who seek support from trusted adults as they navigate their gender identity. I have the privilege of doing so as their health care provider.

What an overstep your government has taken to take this privilege away from our trusted teachers and educators who can be that support to our youth as well, particularly in times when a youth does not have the privilege of a parent, parents, or guardians who will openly accept them for who they are, and in unfortunate cases will cause our youth harm for sharing with their parental unit who they truly are.

Your policy will cause our youth to die. I want you to hear that again: your policy will cause our Saskatchewan youth to die. You are creating an unsafe, unwelcoming, and harmful environment for our youth.

As a physician, I have the privilege of working with youth in a confidential manner. This means they can share their health needs with me, they can share themselves with me, their pronouns with me, and that remains confidential. I only need to share their information if there is reason to believe they are a danger to themselves.

It is ironic, Premier Moe, because you are a danger to others. You have created a policy that puts the lives of our youth in danger. I wish our province had the checks and balances in place to prevent you from causing this danger to our youth. But instead you are choosing to abuse your power to wield the notwithstanding clause. Listen: you are abusing your power. You are directly choosing to put the lives of Saskatchewan youth at danger.

Your policy makes me terrified as a parent. Should my child wish to change their pronouns within their lifetime, I hope that the only response that they get from people is, "Of course we will use these pronouns. It would be so silly not to. Thanks for letting us know your name/pronouns."

Premier Moe, this policy should not have to exist. If the parents across Saskatchewan were welcoming of their own children's identity and openly asked their children what their pronouns are, knew the difference between sex and gender, if we had a provincial curriculum that was most up to date with evidence-based information and practices to teach our children and youth about gender identity, then we would not need a policy that is so clearly devised to out our youth to parents and guardians who are not 100 per cent welcoming of their gender identity.

Our youth deserve so much better. I want you, Premier Moe, and your government to hear this once more. Your policy will cause our youth to die.

And this is by Dr. Kate Morrison and she's at the U of S.

This letter was addressed to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions as well, so I hope he's had a chance to see it. But I'd like others to hear it as well:

Dear Minister McLeod:

Congratulations on your recent appointment as Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Seniors, and Rural and Remote Health. I'm hopeful your background in psychology and law will aid you in advocating for queer youth in Saskatchewan. The announcement regarding teachers being mandated to obtain parental consent for students' name changes and pronoun usage in schools has raised serious concerns within our community.

Government policy changes that lead to the outing of queer youth in schools can have significant and detrimental effects on their mental health and overall well-being. Here are some potential effects:

Stigma and discrimination. Outing queer youth without their consent can expose them to stigma, discrimination, and bullying. They may face increased harassment from peers or even staff members who hold negative attitudes toward

SSLGBTQIA+ individuals.

Isolation and loneliness. Being forcibly outed can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Youth may fear rejection from friends, family, and their community, leading them to withdraw from social interactions and social supports.

Anxiety and depression. The fear of being outed combined with the actual outing experience can trigger or exacerbate anxiety and depression. Constant worry about negative reactions and experiences can lead to chronic stress and a decline in mental health.

Self esteem and self-worth. Outing can impact a young person's self esteem and self-worth. Feeling like their privacy and identity are not respected by their school and government can lead to a diminished sense of self.

Academic performance. The stress and emotional turmoil caused by being outed can negatively impact a student's academic performance. Concentration, motivation, and attendance may suffer, potentially harming the future opportunities.

Suicidal ideation and self-harm. Experiencing discrimination and rejection can increase the risk of suicidal ideation and self-harm among queer youth. They may feel there is no way to escape the distress they are facing.

Coping mechanisms. Some queer youth might resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse or risky behaviours as a way to deal with emotional turmoil caused by being outed and the resulting negative experiences.

Physical health. The mental health impacts of being outed can also affect physical health. Chronic stress and anxiety can contribute to a weakened immune system and other physical health issues.

Future well-being. Negative experiences during adolescence can have lasting effects on an individual's well-being into adulthood. It can impact their ability to form healthy relationships, pursue education and career goals, and enjoy a fulfilling life.

Loss of trust. Government policy changes that lead to outing can erode the trust that queer youth have in institutions meant to protect and support them. This loss of trust can further isolate them and hinder their ability to seek help when needed.

It's important to note that these effects can vary based on individual resilience, support systems, and the specifics of the policy change. To mitigate these potential harms, it's crucial for schools and governments to prioritize 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion, implement comprehensive anti-bullying policies, provide mental health supports, and respect the privacy and identity of queer youth. Creating safe spaces where these individuals can express their identities without fear of negative repercussions is essential for the mental and emotional well-being.

Saskatchewan Pride Network is calling on the Saskatchewan government to immediately pause or reverse this policy, invite consultations with the province's 2SLGBTQIA+ community through its front-line organizations, Pride organizations, school GSAs, and all other interested parties to discuss the state of the policy, to publicly share the safeguards that will be in place to protect youth that inform teachers of their need to change pronouns or their name in school.

Saskatchewan has the potential to lead by example in promoting inclusive education for all. Let us work together to ensure our schools are spaces where diversity is celebrated and every student can be their authentic self without fear or judgment of discrimination.

Yours in pride,

Andrew Matheson
President, Saskatchewan Pride Network

I've got a letter here from a Dr. Emily Jenkins as well. This was sent to the Minister of Education as well, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

Dear Minister Cockrill,

I'm writing to express concern with two recent educational policy changes in schools in Saskatchewan, specifically parental notification and health education. I believe the outcome of the parental notification policy will compromise the safety and well-being of students.

[17:30]

From personal experience. Last year my son expressed concern to us regarding a fellow student who was clearly struggling with lack of acceptance of gender and name choice at home. The student was sufficiently distraught that when we contacted the school counsellor who immediately, confidentially, and empathetically intervened to help this student.

Speed is of the essence. Requiring parental notification would at best have delayed this psychological first aid and at worst made the student's home environment less safe. This policy, however well-intentioned, will have sought undesirable outcomes and increase the burdens of both vulnerable youth and teachers who will be placed in untenable situations.

Regarding sexual health education. As a parent I would prefer that my child be educated by parents, their teachers, and subject matter experts like public health nurses and community organizations with lived experience. The more education, the better [Mr. Speaker].

And she goes on a bit, but I realize that I have a lot of letters I want to get through. I've got a letter here from Reverend Lindsay Mohn:

I'm writing as a concerned citizen, a parent, and a member of the clergy. As a citizen I'm extremely concerned that this

government has passed this policy and is using language that is cloaked in lies and dog whistles. Although they claim to have consulted with parents around the province, they are unable to confirm this statement. As a voter I do not place my confidence in a government that listens to a small but vocal minority rather than taking the time to consider, consult, and listen to all facets of our society.

I am also alarmed with the inappropriate use of the notwithstanding clause which was created to protect human rights, but is being used in this situation to take them away.

As a parent I am extremely concerned that this policy directly targets kids that are already vulnerable and whose fundamental rights are being stripped. I am grateful to be a parent to my children, but I do not own them or control their rights to be whoever they want to be. And this policy infringes on that.

I'm also very concerned about the impact that this policy has on sex ed in the province. Saskatchewan continues to have shockingly high rates of STIs, teen pregnancy, and intimate partner violence. And to limit the ways in which youth are taught comprehensive sexual education goes directly against the recommendations of experts in the field.

As a parent I would like my kids to have access to education from experts and adults that will help them to make healthy and safe decisions when it comes to sexuality and relationships rather than being forced to learn from unreliable sources such as peers on the internet.

And finally, as a member of the clergy I speak for a large community of concerned Christians who believe in the sacred gift of 2SLGBTQ+ people. The voices of those Christians who claim that gender and sexual diversity is a sin have been loud and violent, but I want to assure you there are many people of faith who have worked for decades to affirm, welcome, and walk with the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Our faith also reminds us that we are called to protect the vulnerable people on those margins. If even one child in Saskatchewan is harmed by this policy, that is too many.

I urge the government to immediately discard this policy. If needed, there is true concern for our levels of parental involvement in schools and there are other ways to do it. And the first step is to listen to a wider swath of parents that actually represents this province rather than the minority who have been the loudest.

I've got a note from another parent here as well, Anne-Marie Wheeler. She's also a professor at the University of Saskatchewan:

How does referring to people by their preferred names and pronouns impact me directly? The answer is, it doesn't. It costs me absolutely nothing to acknowledge people's humanity in the words they choose. It is my pleasure and I feel honoured when people entrust me with their identities.

What does impact me directly is that the Saskatchewan Party is wasting time and money on cruel, dismissive, and

divisive politics while children across the province remain without a pediatric gastroenterologist, among other appalling gaps in our health care system. The Saskatchewan Party is trumpeting ignorance, fuelling hate, eroding our social fabric.

One of the final things I'd like to do before I wrap up, Mr. Speaker, is I do want to read a couple of letters from folks directly within the community. And I think that this is really important, because as we've talked about understanding different perspectives, having a bit of empathy, seeing things in a way that a trans or gender-diverse person might see them, I think it's crucial that this government takes note of some of those things.

And I unfortunately don't have time to get through all the letters that I have here today or the ability to keep standing for hours and hours like my other colleague, but I do want to provide some of those. I do want to read a couple of those into the record as well. And it will be hard to pick, but I will have to . . . I will select a few and I will just provide some highlights here on some queer perspective, Mr. Speaker.

So this letter's from Eric Horbal, and it says:

Dear Scott Moe:

I am writing to you to express my disappointment with your government. Your plans to ignore the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and push harmful legislation reflect poorly on who you are as people of Saskatchewan, what the Saskatchewan Party stands for, and ultimately what our great province of Saskatchewan stands for.

To give you some background, my name is Eric Horbal and I am a 20-year-old gay man living in the riding of Regina Rochdale. I attempted to contact my MLA, Laura Ross, to express my anger and disappointment with this proposed policy, but there was no answer.

[Inaudible interjection] . . . This is a letter I'm quoting.

An Hon. Member: — You can't quote a letter.

Ms. Mowat: — We've been quoting letters for hours.

Because of Ms. Ross's lack of attempting to connect with a constituent, this letter serves as a message to both you, Ms. Ross, along with the entire Sask Party caucus.

Coming out and being who you are is very difficult . . . [And I understand why the members opposite don't want to hear this. It's hard to hear.] Coming out and being who you are is very difficult. It takes a lot of courage and it is something someone never takes lightly. If I would have been given the choice when I was a young boy to not be gay, I would have taken it. But unfortunately life doesn't work like that, and sexuality is something you are ultimately born with.

After confronting the inevitability that I was gay, I suffered from poor mental health and closed myself off from the world. The things that I loved to do, I quit, and I entered a depressive state. This continued for several years until I was

16 years old and I faced a point in my life where I faced a breaking point and I decided I had to be true to myself.

When I told my parents, I was terrified. I remember the exact day even. It was July 25th of 2019. When I told my mom and dad, I could barely even get the words out. I was so terrified they would reject me and would not accept me for me. It was hard for them at first, but they ultimately came around to it very quickly. I didn't know why I was worried about it so much in the first place because my parents were always very accepting and open to things like that, but on the inside I was worried because I never wanted to disappoint them or be judged for the person I became.

As the years have gone on, coming out has instilled a new confidence in me in who I am. I was president of the SRC in my old high school, Winston Knoll Collegiate, and I have gotten involved in the community through being a curling coach and being a leader in the university community at the U of R. The good things that happen to me in my life I attribute to coming out and being who I am.

When I am writing this letter, it is early October. I am 20 years old, very gay, and not afraid to be who I am. At the same time as this, your government wants to force through legislation that will harm young kids by telling them it is not okay to be who they are. I'm going to set the scene to show you an example of what damage you are going to create for vulnerable children across the province.

Let's pretend that it was five years ago and rather than having supportive parents — I did — I have extremely intolerant parents who believe that transgender people do not deserve the same rights as everyone else holds. Also rather than being gay, I am someone who is questioning their gender and doesn't feel comfortable in my own body. It takes a lot of courage for me to finally come out, and the only people that know are those people in my school and my teacher.

Before this policy, my teacher understands that if she is forced to tell my parents, it likely would not have ended well. I might have self-harmed, which disproportionately affects trans kids more than any other group studied, or even have thoughts of suicide, which is the highest amongst trans youth compared to every other group. Now with this policy in place, students who fear repercussions at home end up with their intolerant parents knowing, that it leads to consequences that are unimaginable and hard for anyone to stomach.

This is for the Sask Party as a whole. What if you were the parent or grandparent of someone who is transgender? Would you accept them for who they truly were? Or would you support their likely death through suicide? Think about it as a parent.

I'm just looking for a specific letter here, Mr. Speaker. I want to read this letter from a 16-year-old. The writing is not incredibly legible, so please bear with me as I'm reading through because it wasn't typed out, Mr. Speaker. And I'm just going to read a few pieces of it. This is from Bambi, a 16-year-old nonbinary student in grade 11, "was going to write an anonymous letter but felt it

was more humanizing to use my name." Talks about being successful academically and trying to be a good example:

Trans students who aren't supported are at a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. That makes school more difficult. Why should we be prioritizing so-called "parents' rights" that were never actually at risk over the mental health and ability for students to learn in a safe environment?

They also said, "I've met too many kids who've been outed to their parents and suffered because of it. I've known people who have tried to kill themselves over it." And also, "Schools should be a safe place for children, more than it is for parents. What gives you the right to take that away?"

From Carla Harris in Regina University, writing to say that they're a gender-nonconforming person with a disability who is also queer, who "only felt safe enough to come out and be my true self after I was 35, when I had lived outside the province for 10 years":

Since the day Scott Moe launched this attempt to erase the lives and identity of young people who are discovering their identity and their futures, I have been immensely depressed. I'm struggling with my health condition of complex PTSD really flaring up with depression, and all I can think of is my child self in middle school in Raymore, Saskatchewan when some kid called me gay and laughed at me. This has affected my ability to work today.

To be clear, this policy has affected this individual to work today:

I struggle remembering how many times I'd considered myself broken or gross as a child. This is not true, and until kids live freely to see other people and other things around them and make them comprehend how different everyday life is, we will be holding the lives of both queer kids and the lives of cisgender, heteronormative kids too. You learn from seeing how vastly different each human experience is and how we can only make our own decisions, not impose decisions on others.

[17:45]

In the words of Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, "I am deeply troubled by the impact this policy will have on the rights of children in Saskatchewan."

I support communication and collaboration between home and school, but I do not support outing vulnerable kids. This will intentionally fuel homophobic and transphobic hatred at school, work, and home.

These policy changes will negatively impact:

Autonomy and safety. Some vulnerable youth will undoubtedly be forced into unsupportive and unsafe situations at both home and school.

Confidentiality and trust. By implementing this policy, youth will refrain from seeking support from school staff they may otherwise trust, ultimately leading to further

isolation.

Stigma. This policy will create a hostile learning environment where some students will be alienated and bullied.

Sexual health literacy. Universal and consent-focused sexual health education is a critical tool to reduce Saskatchewan's nation-leading levels of teen pregnancy, HIV and STI rates, and intimate partner violence.

I join the call for Premier Moe, Minister Duncan, and the Sask Party government, and all MLAs to revoke these harmful, regressive policies.

My colleague already read the FSIN letter. I want to include an Indigenous voice here that I think really highlights some important aspects here. This is Tyler George. He's a headperson counsellor at Ochapowace Nation. It says:

tânisi. Good evening. Was here on the day of the protest.

I sit on the Assembly of First Nations national council as a Saskatchewan representative for 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, which allows me to do work with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations as well. As you may be aware, AFN is an advocacy organization that advocates for all First Nations in Canada. I'm also a headperson counsellor for Ochapowace Nation, responsible for law and justice and family wellness, sports, and recreation.

The chiefs in assembly at the AFN level unanimously passed a resolution to ensure that we have 2SLGBTQQIA+ voices at our tables, as our nations have always had, as part of our history, culture, and traditions. I share this with you as I understand you reconvene your meeting tomorrow at the Legislative Building.

This is what I've heard that stood out: 10,000 people have been consulted from the Saskatchewan Party government to move forward on this policy. I'm not sure about that though. And then the judge said this policy would cause irreparable harm to a vulnerable community.

My personal response is Indigenous people are not surprised when the government says they consulted with necessary groups, but they didn't consult with actual professionals, experts, or the groups they are harming. Indigenous people know all too well. This is why we have and ask for the duty-to-consult. This policy infringes on Indigenous/2S people's inherent right to self-determination and autonomy.

From Jes Battis in Regina, pronouns they/theym. They teach queer and trans studies as well as creative writing at the University of Regina:

Many of my students are queer and trans. All of them have been traumatized by a province that does not care about their welfare.

They go on to say:

I was a trans kid who grew up in a small town, an

environment that was hostile to gender expression in every way. I hoped that my students would inherit a better world. And I am both angry and dismayed to see the Sask Party is targeting vulnerable trans kids with no thought of the consequences. Children will experience grievous harm as a result of these policies. Children will die.

I won't get to see them in my classrooms [this person teaches at the post-secondary level] because they won't live to experience university and connect with diverse groups of students like them. I won't see them supporting each other, building communities. This is the reality the Sask Party has chosen, a future where trans kids are continually unsafe, and by extension, all kids are unsafe.

From Kelby Cottenie in Regina:

Thus the only thing this bill serves to do is to stigmatize trans and two-spirit youth and sow division for the sake of politicking. If we are truly concerned about parent/child relationships, we should put more funding into family counselling options, especially those that are gender-affirming and can help navigate those conversations. If we are concerned about parents being able to get involved in their child's school life, we should be funding our schools and teachers and hiring more teachers and counsellors so there's an increased capacity to get parents involved.

From Charlie van Metre:

I am 15 years old and a transgender male. I'm from a small town in rural Saskatchewan. It's not where I go anymore. I now have to drive 45 minutes every day into Saskatoon to attend school because I was a victim of physical and verbal discrimination. I had to move schools because I wasn't safe in the building.

I bring this up because of this quote:

I understand that cisgendered peoples don't know the horror of it. But let's just say one day you are called a name that is not your own and you are identified as a gender that you do not identify as. What if we added genital body parts that you didn't want? How do you think you'd feel? Depression affects the majority of transgender youth and I know you know the statistics of that.

I think we probably do, hopefully by my speech today, Mr. Speaker:

I appreciate the backlash and the fight against the Sask Party because if our province keeps continuing down this path, it could turn into the most hateful and dangerous place for our youth. Not only the ones affected by the policy, but the ones who are taught to think that what the Sask Party is doing is right.

Mr. Speaker, I have pages and pages and pages of letters from folks in the queer community, a few more than 18 emails. In fact, I dare say, I read more than 18. And I could sit here and read every single one of them and tell you when we've gotten to 18 and see if the government's made up their mind yet, Mr. Speaker. But I would just like to close with a couple of quick, final

thoughts here.

Mr. Speaker, this policy that's before us today that, you know, we've canvassed — 4 per cent of people agree with using the notwithstanding clause here. Mr. Speaker, this policy that we've canvassed here today, I would submit, the government has not provided any evidence that this is an emergency that warrants an emergency session.

Would argue that we have had very real, very serious emergencies in our province where we've called for an emergency session such as during August 2021 when we were in the fourth wave of COVID. We called on this Assembly to address the startling death rates in this province as we were shipping patients to ICU in Ontario, and this Assembly did not meet at that time. This government did not call an emergency session when record numbers of people were dying under its watch. That does not constitute an emergency.

And I have yet to be convinced that the gender pronoun issue constitutes an emergency, have yet to see a single example of where this has created a problem in school, for parents. I've yet to see or yet to hear a single example. And you know, I have a feeling that if they had one, we'd hear it by now, because it would be in their best interests to provide those examples, Mr. Speaker.

But that's not what we're hearing. So we're left to conclude that what's happening here is the government sowing division for its own political gain, afraid of what happened in Lumsden-Morse, afraid of the success of the Sask United Party, scared of losing their most right wing base and pandering for political gain, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're left to conclude here.

And my response to that is no, don't let kids get in the way, Mr. Speaker. It's astonishing that this policy was not well thought out, that it was cooked up in five days after 18 letters, Mr. Speaker. It's astonishing that this is how the Saskatchewan Party governs in this province. It shows that they're tired, it shows that they're out of touch, and it shows that we need change in this province, because New Democrats will protect minority rights. Mr. Speaker, with that I would move to adjourn debate on this bill for today.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member has moved to adjourn debate. And I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay, the member has moved to adjourn debate so we have to put the question. Is it in agreement of the Assembly to adjourn debate?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: — No.

The Deputy Speaker: — The motion is not to adjourn debate. So now we will recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you. It's an honour for me to stand here to address this Assembly for the first time. It's a dream come true.

Words cannot express my gratitude towards the constituents of Regina Coronation Park for choosing me their MLA. I am

honoured and humbled by the trust they placed in me. Mr. Speaker, during my election campaign I was out door knocking every day. My constituents, they opened their doors for me, shared their concerns, offered me and my team cold water on the hottest day of the summer, and let us into their houses to protect us from the rain. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to the Coronation Park constituents. I couldn't have done that without you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was born in the small town of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, my village close to the border of Afghanistan. People in those areas, they speak four common languages. One is Urmari, second Pashto, third Saraiki, fourth is Urdu. I am very fluent in all those languages. The only language that I have learned, the last one, the fifth one, is English. And I know it is very hard to learn another language at the time when you are an adult, so you will have to excuse me for my accent, any errors that I make in English. Mr. Speaker, certainly English is the hardest language that I learned.

[18:00]

I received Master of Computer Science from Quaid-i-Azam University, one of the reputed organizations of Pakistan, and began my career as a software engineer and a project manager. In 2002 I served as an IT [information technology] consultant with United Nations, Ghana, West Africa.

I immigrated to Canada in 2003 and moved to Saskatchewan in 2008. I moved from Cambridge, Ontario to Saskatchewan for the SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program] program that was announced by the Government of Saskatchewan in 2005 to sponsor my sibling. I bought a house in Regina Coronation Park and have been living there since with my wife and my children. Regina Coronation Park holds a special place in my heart.

Here in Regina Coronation Park I started as a driver educator with Royale Driving Academy owned by Brian Fryklund who is a retired police officer. Both Brian Fryklund and his wife, Terry Fryklund, were very kind, very supportive, and welcoming. It is due to their hospitality that I stayed, and now I call Saskatchewan my home.

I established a successful business wherein I provided driver education to eight different high school divisions in Saskatchewan. I run a driver education program in partnership with Regina Street Culture, Regina Open Door Society, and Paul Dojack Youth Centre.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am a father, an educator, and small-business owner, and dedicated member of Regina community. I have spent countless hours volunteering in my community. Making a meaningful difference in the life of those I serve is my core value. When there was an opportunity to put my name forward for the NDP nomination in my constituency, I knew that was my true calling. This is why I am standing in front of you in this Assembly today.

It takes a team to make a history. I had a great team behind me. Their hard work, commitment, and dedication was inspiring. Thank you to my campaign manager, Cheryl Loadman, for her roll-up-your-sleeves attitude. She did an amazing job connecting the diverse community of Regina Coronation Park. She loved

coffee, and you can tell by the pile of empty cups on her desk in my campaign. A lot of sleepless nights went into me being here today, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you very much to Ken Imhoff, Khalid Awan, Rob Deglau, and Ziauddin for helping me earn the support of the citizens of Regina Coronation Park. Thank you to the very energetic volunteers team and voter contacts team members Shouzab Awan, Landen Kleisinger, Cheryl Stecyk, and Alayne Dubord. Special thanks to Malik Umar Draz and Don Young for his guidance and constant canvassing and campaigning.

Thank you to the countless volunteers who supported my campaign by leaflet dropping in mail boxes, door knocking, phone calling, and driving on the hottest day of summer. Thank you for your time and your energy.

Thank you to Syed Arif, Shobna Radons, Rana Tariq, Darren Milo, Zafar Iqbal, Mashiur Rahman, Ibrar Hussain, Javed Akbar, Ayaz Khan, Zeeshan, Zahoor, Dr. Abdul Bais, Joan Pratchler, Abdul Jabbar, Bhajan Brar, and Asmat Anwar, and the last one in here, for their support in my campaign. I sincerely couldn't have done it without you.

Big thanks to our leader for her hard and brilliant work to win both seats of Regina Coronation Park and Walsh Acres. She was with us on my doorsteps and chatted with many constituents. Thank you to all our MLAs for being generous and wise and support each and every steps in my campaign.

Thank you to the member of Regina Coronation Park for being helping us a lot at every step that we need, at every door we need, anything. And I would say a thank you to the member of Regina Rosemont for being my mentor. I learned a lot from your experience in politics and will never forget your supporting and welcoming word. You always said, Noor, I'm a phone call away from you when you need. Thank you for all your guidance and advices throughout my campaign.

Thank you to Craik Wotherspoon and Faye Wotherspoon for being actively involved in canvassing on my campaign. I will say to congratulate to both . . . so all the by-election candidates from Lumsden-Morse, from Regina Walsh Acres, for getting a trust from your community and that's why you are here today. And thank you for the hard work that you guys did in the hottest days of the summer.

Thank you to my former MLA from Regina Coronation Park, Mark Docherty, who served our community for almost 12 years. He was a strong voice for Regina Coronation Park.

Thank you to the by-election candidates Olasehinde Ben Adebayo, Kendra Anderson, Riaz Ahmad, Reid Hill for running a very positive campaign in Regina Coronation Park.

Finally I want to thank my family especially my wife, Shamim Mahnoor Burki, for her support. Without her I would not be able to achieve this success. Mr. Deputy Speaker, she is my rock. Thank you for all my seven daughters, Saadia, Lubna, Bushra, Nimra, Sara, Safa, and Sana, for all their love. I will make you proud.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for my late father, Mohmmad

Arif, late mother, Gul Roshanna, for their hard work to raise me with love and give me a very good education which is something that I will never forget in my life. Thank you to my older brother Allaudin Burki for his encouragement in the entire campaign.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me tell you about my constituency. It's located in Regina north between the 1st Avenue up to the north Ring Road between Winnipeg Street and Argyle Street, Uplands and north side of the Argyle Park as well. I'm very proud to say that Northgate Mall is located in my constituency, Regina Coronation Park.

My constituency is predominantly made up of working-class families and is considered to be one of the most diverse constituencies in Regina. The largest immigrant community is Muslim and the only Islamic high school in Regina, Regina Huda School, is located in this constituency. The second-largest immigrant community is the Filipino community. Many families from this community reside in our constituency to send their children to our Harvest City Christian Academy, St. Peter, and O'Neill high school.

Laval school in Regina, the only francophone school in the city, I am very proud to say it's located in our constituency as well. This French school serves families from Regina, White City, Emerald Park, and surrounding communities that seek quality francophone education for their children at elementary and high school levels. The French first language education offered at Laval is delivered by teachers who are inspired by best practices in use across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Coronation Park has five high schools and 10 elementary schools. I'm very proud to say that I have been teaching in these four high schools since 2009. For most of the constituents, I'm not a stranger but I'm a friend, colleague, mentor, and educator.

In my election campaign, I knocked on thousands of doors and chatted over a thousand constituents. Over and over I heard the same concern about affordability and cost of living. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm reminded, one of my constituents who is a health care worker and due to the current power hikes, increase in grocery prices, and inflation, she can't afford her family even though she is working two jobs and she is looking for a third one. She's doing everything right but nothing is working for her. It's heartbreaking.

These are our front-line workers that our province depends on, yet in return we fail them when they need us the most. Many families cannot afford to keep their children in sports and extracurricular activities as the price of everything has increased.

The recent increases to groceries has put a significant strain on our food banks. Due to high interest rates, it's nearly impossible for young people to become homeowners. We have subsidized houses sitting empty while the homeless crisis worsens.

A lot of people have concerns about the long waiting time at emergency departments in our hospitals. Mr. Deputy Speaker, one constituent who went to the hospital as he felt pain in his chest, he went immediately to the hospital and waited there about eight hours to be checked by a doctor. He couldn't wait anymore and he came back very disappointed.

Another family told me that they were waiting for hip replacement surgery but because of the long waiting list, they decided to go to Turkey where the operation took place immediately. This speaks volumes on the current state of our province's health care system.

Mr. Speaker, one other family was waiting for an MRI for their loved one but were told that they would have to wait for at least six months. They went back to their home country and had their MRI within one week. Constituents also told me that the knee replacement surgery in Alberta is very fast. However by receiving treatment in Alberta, Saskatchewan doctors will avoid providing patients with following care. Instead they tell patients to return to Alberta for this follow-up care. We have to maintain both our patients and our doctors in Saskatchewan. It's the time to listen to the health care professionals and handle all those concerns in the way that the people of this province deserve.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our beloved seniors who have spent their whole life building this province, what it is today, deserve respect and honour. Currently in my constituency, the 60-bedroom Luther care home is notified for closure. The SHA is planning to relocate seniors to another care home. As we talked with the seniors at their care home, they tell us that they call this place their home. Some of them were close relatives who want to stay together and some of them are good friends who don't want to be apart. Mr. Deputy Speaker, all those who were paying taxes all their life and raised their children must not . . . be rewarded the way they deserve, not to be treated like this.

[18:15]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all know the importance of education. Spending money on education is not a cost but it is an investment. One of the common phrases is that education always pays you back. We have to prioritize our Saskatchewan residents in professional education. The more professionals we have locally, the more our province will be self-sufficient.

As a driver educator, I have been working very closely with high school teachers and administrators. Most of the concerns that I heard from the teachers are in regard to the cuts of education; overcrowded classroom size; shortage of teachers, language pathologists, and psychologists. I urge for a fully funded educational institution so our future faces are successful lifelong.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard over and over from a lot of residents that we can't find a job in Saskatchewan. Due to our province having the lowest minimum wage in the country, young generations are moving out of province. Young people are the backbone of our communities, and we must retain them in our province by investment in local businesses and minimizing outsourcing jobs.

And now, Mr. Speaker, I will address the issues of the bill, Bill 137. This bill is not something that I support. Rushing this bill through the legislature in just a few days using the notwithstanding clause is not appropriate. I came to this country from overseas, like I said earlier. I wanted to come to Canada because this country respects human rights, and where democracy is strong.

Pushing this bill forward with the notwithstanding clause is

undemocratic and it goes against the human rights code. And so, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this bill because it goes against human rights and, as Justice Megaw said in his ruling, it will cause irreparable harm to young people.

It makes me wonder what Charter rights will be next. Rights for the newcomer to this country? When government issues the law to undermine the human rights of one minority group, it creates a slippery slope for the rights of other minorities to be taken away.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the private schools in our community, doing a very good job in the communities, they are funded by various local school divisions. If they don't want to implement this policy at their school as a part of their faith or culture, I'm worried that they might be thrown away by the school division without any financial support. In that situation, I can see that there will be an increase of fees on parents, approximately over \$1,000 per month per child, which is three times higher. Those schools will lose their strength as most of the parents cannot afford the high cost of monthly fees, and God forbid, might cause the school to be closed.

Mr. Speaker, for as long as I have the honour, I will focus on serving and bettering my community. All the hard work of past years has brought me here today. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — Well that was a good maiden speech. I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To join in on adjourned debates on Bill 137, initially I'm going to make some opening comments and then come back and forth to some of I guess the wisdom and the concerns that have been expressed in this Assembly to the government that has decided to move forward on a piece of legislation.

You know, I have been here for a number of years, and probably some will say maybe too long. And you know, 16 years is long enough; get out of Dodge. But seriously, I have been one person that . . . I can say I'm proud of that I've advocated when it comes to mental health, the suicide crisis in our province. So many of our Indigenous people have struggled and struggled with mental health and have struggled with suicide. I will continue to advocate and do what I can when I see someone feeling like they're not being heard by their government.

And that's important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to be heard by your government. We realize at the end of the day, governments are elected in, but you know, I want to remind the government and members opposite that the people will get a chance to speak. And we're hearing a lot of them now through listening to letters from different organizations, from individuals. There's many of them. They're being read into the record.

And I give credit to my colleagues who have read those letters into the record. The hope . . . And I've asked the government to make sure that you're willing to hear what the people are saying. You've chosen for a small group. And I've heard different amounts of comments on how many people have been consulted, how many letters that you guys heard as individuals, some saying they haven't heard anything. So some of my colleagues have kind

of put that forward.

All I can say, and I think about Tristen Durocher. And I want to take a little time. Because back home we lost so many young people to suicide, for different reasons. But they were Indigenous, Métis, First Nation, northern people. Impacted. Suicide impacted them. Different reasons why. But you hope a government will stand up and say, there is a crisis going on and we're going to assist. We're going to do something.

And this talks about legislation. We want our governments to come up with legislation that helps our citizens. Whether they're First Nation, Métis, northern, it doesn't matter. Rural, urban, wherever they are. It doesn't matter who they are. I don't look at a person . . . I just hope the government will pass legislation that's meaningful, that is to help our citizens. That's what we trust. That's why people elect members. That's why the members opposite have been elected. It's to respond to your constituents. So in your hearts, at the end of the day, I've got a few things to say to some of you when I conclude my remarks.

But I just want to say, we have done a lot of work to advocate for our northern people, our Indigenous people. And you know, I give credit to Tristen and the group, you know, Walking with Our Angels, everyone that came out to support. For years we asked the government to come up with legislation, to support a bill three times I introduced as a member of Cumberland. Not that that's my bill, but it was on behalf of the people that were struggling, families. There were so many families who struggled, and they were hoping the government would do something.

And I have to say, you know, it was pretty disappointing to see government not support the bill. But eventually, on the third time . . . It took an outcry from our province, from walking from Air Ronge to Regina, Tristen Durocher and a group to bring awareness to what was going on, a crisis.

And at the time we all went back and I heard different speeches. We'd been in adjourned debates about certain issues and people did say some things back and forth. And some of us reached out and we thought maybe we can take care of some of the most vulnerable children, most vulnerable people were struggling, and we thought . . . And I said I would work with the government. And I tried to, I can tell you. I left here a little hurt sometimes when we wanted to see some different action. When families came in here who had lost their loved ones, I was hoping the government would say, okay, we need to do the right thing. Politics is one thing but we need to do the right thing; we have to come up with a plan.

And the government decided it had a plan and it wanted to stick to that plan. They didn't want to open it up anywhere else. And that's the legislation we talked about. Government gets to make the legislation. And I realize you have so many members on that side in your powerful government; you can pretty well pass anything you want. You are. You're a large government. I say that. I truly hope when I get close to the end of my comments you'll understand that maybe the people will send you a message, and maybe you'll hear that message. But that's up to you as individuals.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it doesn't matter where you go, and you talk to people back home. You know, I assist people

losing their power. They just can't afford the cost of living. And you look at the cost of living, and you look at the challenges that people, families are struggling with. And it's not just in the North. It's not just our Indigenous people. It's right throughout this province. Our seniors. And you see people and you see more and more homeless people. You see more people asking for help, and they're trying and they're hoping their government will respond. And some people . . . We have heard different members talk about the challenges, because again, it's legislation. It's the power of the government to take care of the people. You're entrusted with them and I'm hoping that you guys will look at that.

I don't know who came up with the plan, the idea, and I have a few comments about why this piece of . . . But when I heard all the different challenges, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that our province is having and people are struggling. And I mean people are struggling to feed their children, to make sure to clothe them, to pay the bills, how many people I've helped with their power being cut off. And you try to work with SaskPower, our Crown corporation, the people's Crown corporation, and how many times power bills have been raised — different issues.

So we talk about how our government is supposed to take care of the people, and I say that. They're supposed to come up with legislation. And when you see all of the different challenges that are going on in our province . . . And my colleagues have talked about some of the challenges and put it on the record, and I want to thank them for that. I want to, you know, thank the member from Saskatoon Eastview who very passionately, as an educator, talked for quite some time. I mean I was really impressed and I give him credit. Passionate letters from individuals he wrote into the record hoping government will hear that.

And when you do that, I think the people who are sending letters, whether you're an organization, you're individuals, you're family — you know, moms, dads, whoever, grandma, mosôm, kohkom — it doesn't matter. If you're sending in letters to your MLAs and you're sending in letters to government and you're saying to them please, you know, put the brakes on here. Let's stop and have a serious conversation. Let's talk. Let's talk about what you're trying to do.

But when I see all the different things that are going on and I see for the record the letters, and then I see our Indigenous FSIN sending a letter. And today when I heard that letter being read . . . I heard a little bit about it, but when the member from Saskatoon Eastview read it into the record, honestly, I want to say to FSIN and the First Nations that have supported that, thank you, thank you, and thank you because Indigenous people have not had the opportunity.

I wish we were dealing with legislation that said Indigenous people will have a meaningful duty-to-consult and accommodate. That's what I wish this legislation would be. There's legislation that really warrants government to deal with. But we've seen how you have dealt with that as my colleague on this side, the member, you know, the member on this side who's the critic for First Nations and Métis relations. You know, and we see how . . . [inaudible].

Legislation is so vital, and I think we put a lot of trust and faith into it, that it's what will govern our province. And we have a

beautiful province. It is a beautiful province. It's many people coming together.

We may pick and choose our battles in this Assembly, and some of us will come back and get re-elected, you know, and some of us will retire and not come back in here to do this legislation. And some of you will find out that you have not listened to the people that elected you and you'll get an answer or you'll get re-elected. But that's your decision and I leave that with you.

[18:30]

I think about our Indigenous members on this side. I know 100 per cent the Indigenous members, our caucus on this side, we want to call ourselves a small little caucus of Indigenous individuals. I can tell you this much: we will not be supporting this bill. Very clear where I will not be, I know that. I'm hoping, I'm hoping the Indigenous members on that side will have a second look at this bill and say, hey, hold it, our organization, our Indigenous people are saying . . . I'm hoping. I would encourage them to do that. I encourage everyone, but I'm speaking to the Indigenous members on that side. I hope you will rethink this. Put the brakes on.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know we're going to go back and forth here and, I've said this, the government will do what it wants. But when you think about the challenges, we're supposed to be here making a province better. We talk about safety. We're supposed to make sure our province is safe for the residents. The most vulnerable, we're taking care of the most vulnerable. And I talked about that earlier when I talked about a crisis and the government could act on it.

You know, when I think about the bill that passed . . . And again I've done my praise to members opposite and I heard passionate speeches and I thought, okay, we're going to get legislation and it would have some teeth and we could start working together. And I think about a committee. We want, you know, a bipartisan committee of members on both sides to go around this province. And I asked that.

Well we had families who had lost their children to suicide. They were in the galleries hoping the government would give me leave under Rule 61 to make a motion to have a special committee of members on both sides. I've been on some of those committees and we've done some good work. Others have been on different committees and did some wonderful work. And there could have been legislation coming together that would help the individuals.

But unfortunately the government wouldn't give me leave to introduce that, in front of those families who lost their children to suicide. Here we have a situation where a crisis is going on and you could not, in front of those families, support that. You couldn't go around the province and have school divisions, counsellors, professionals, parents, those families that lost loved ones to give you input, go to other jurisdictions and see what is the best practice when it comes to suicide.

And I wondered about it and I was hurt and I was angry. And I left here hurt and angry and mad. And some of you I had as friends and I said, you're my friends because I thought we felt you wanted to help people. And I tell you, I left, a hole still in my heart. But I asked my Creator, my higher power, to help me.

I hope you will help the most vulnerable children in our province and not find ways to cause grief and hurt, not to cause more pain to any family. There's been enough pain in our province when it comes to our Indigenous people, our northern people, our urban people, our rural. I think our people have hurt enough. They need a government that's willing to take care of the most vulnerable.

We used to be such a proud province. We continue and can be a proud province. I'm proud. I'm proud of being a Métis person. I'm proud. I have many grandchildren that are First Nations, Métis. I'm proud, and I will do all I can to advocate for them. If anybody needs help, I will do that. I always have. I will advocate.

You know, I didn't want to talk lots, to be honest with you, today. And I told my colleagues I've been struggling and I didn't want to talk lots. At times when you're passionate about things and certain issues and they hit you . . . And I go to enough funerals and pay my condolences to families. I don't want to come here and always it has to be a fight. But unfortunately, for some reason, here we are.

We talked about emergency session, coming back here, and I thought well maybe this was going to be something very great that's going to help Saskatchewan people and the most vulnerable, and we're going to do things. And it could have been. But what are we doing here? Here we are now, sitting, debating, having a debate. And we could talk about . . . My colleague talked about the cost and all those and gave thanks to the staff and everyone else that's doing, they're doing, and I give credit to everyone that's doing that.

But we're here, having to deal with a serious situation. Many have asked you, as a government, to the Premier and to your government, to stop and take a break. Put the brakes on. And then when you see the letters from organizations, you see groups, the rallies of students. And I give credit to the students that have come on the stairwell and on the grounds of their Legislative Assembly to say, this is wrong.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank those individuals, those parents, those teachers, those groups that showed up at a rally to come forward and let this government know, put the brakes on. Stop. The most vulnerable, you're going to impact. And then when you hear the judge, and my colleague had expressed it and he went through the judge's ruling. And here you have a judge warning. You have a judge warning you, the government, to put the brakes on. Let a process go through.

I'm not going to say that I'm going to be the best individual up here to debate bills. Some of you articulate that stuff so well, and I'm proud of the way some people are too. I'm just a Métis with no land. And I say that back in a way. We have a lot to do when it comes to our Métis. And I know their voice, and I'm going to be reaching out to some of my Métis friends and my colleagues and my leaders and ask them, please voice to the government, please voice to the government that they need to put the brakes on and have a dialogue.

Now I look at the different individuals that will come out and, you know, the child's advocate has come out, different groups have come out. Some that have been in the gallery. I think the John Howard Society was here. I just keep thinking about the different groups that are coming forward, ringing the alarm bells

to the government and the Premier to say, put the brakes on. Take time. But what happens, we get called back here to deal with something, you know, as an emergency sitting. And fine, we're here. We'll do what we need to do. And I'll do my part to express my views and where I'm at, and hope the government will put the brakes on and stop.

But you look at the different individuals and then you see the different groups who have expressed such good advice to just to say to somebody, hey, maybe you got this wrong. Like maybe it's time to put the brakes on and seriously stop and look at this. But for some reason it's being pushed ahead. I don't know for why. I have no clue. You know, and I use . . .

I don't even understand the notwithstanding clause, to be honest with you. I had a look. What the heck is that? It gives this power. Hasn't been used in 25 years, but all of a sudden it's going to be used. They want to use this to make sure. And then I start getting a better understanding of it and it's being used to almost . . . What I'm hearing and seeing is some of the most vulnerable children, again it's going to be used to take away their rights. And I ask myself, was that the intent of the notwithstanding clause? Is that the intent of the notwithstanding clause was to do that? Just to take some youth, someone's rights and take it away?

And you know, I listened to my colleague who did his maiden speech earlier, and he talked about, where will this government be willing to go next? Where will the government be willing to go to take on rights and trample on someone's rights? And it is something to pay attention to, because there are stuff that people talk about, you know. Somebody came and they take something and then the next, somebody else comes. Who knows where you're going to go with it.

But you know, overall I've listened to such passionate responses to the Bill 137 and the concerns and parents. And I've said, you know, the hurt, there's enough hurt. And we need to have passion. And I think about how is it that individuals, you know, when you have a commissioner of human rights very clearly resign, I mean that in itself, if that doesn't bring shock waves to the government, I don't know what else will. Like what will it take?

And then I find out, okay, in this notwithstanding clause, because I'm just asking a little bit of information because I don't understand — I want to try understand it — okay, it's used to trample on someone's rights. It's used to do this. And then also in there, it's used because of the judge's . . . I'm assuming maybe the judge or somebody giving warning that this could cause great harm to children, to somebody, that maybe somebody would be held accountable. Well no, but we've . . . What I've got is there's legislation that there's going to be protection so that nobody can be held accountable who brought it forward. And I don't know if I'm understanding it right but I'm trying to understand the process. I'm trying.

And I ask myself, a province as great as ours with such resources, how did you get here to think that would be your priority, that Bill 137 needed to be the priority to bring us back here, to use the notwithstanding clause? There's so much stuff that you're hearing from people who are ringing alarm bells, are telling you. Like I don't know what it will take for the government to put the brakes on. Seriously, I don't know if there's any individual, any

group, any organization that can come forward to say to the government, like stop and take a breather; stop and think this through.

Like why? Why would we want to cause — you may not; maybe you don't, but I don't know this — cause more grief to anyone where they would tempt or want to feel so bad mentally about themselves that they would take their own life? How, how could anyone do that? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not understand how anyone could even think about the warnings, the cautions that are coming, the alarm bells that are going off. I don't know. I don't know.

But like I said, there's so many different groups that have wrote in, that have written, have brought their concerns forward. And again I go back to a province that I think I've given credit when the government has announced a little more funding, a little more help when it comes to mental health and addictions. But at the end of the day, when you're in a crisis and a family is in a crisis and they need someone to actually take care of their child, take care of a loved one, it's important. They need a government to respond, to make sure the resources are there for them. And I see that going on right now, more and more, more and more at the schools. They're trying to do what they can. I give credit to our school divisions, to our front-line staff, our teachers. There is so much that they do and they see. And sometimes, you know, we take it for granted.

And really, I don't know. My family, my aunts and uncles, a lot of them were teachers, principal. My mom really pushed that with education. She was the oldest, and they did that. Education was important. It was. And they did that. And I think about them, and looking at them and thinking about how proud they are and how they always wanted to help people.

And you know, I don't know what it is with the government, and I don't know what the problem is with teachers and where there seems to be something going on. I don't know if that's what it is, you know. That's up to the government to answer, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's up to the government to find those answers and figure out what the problem is.

So I really don't know why, you know, we've done the emergency sitting. Willing to come and sit and go back when . . . And then some of the members are very upset at some of the stuff that my colleagues have said. They've taken it very, really to offence. And I understand that. And I think that was . . . On that part of it, I'm glad you took offence. Because you should be. You should be upset that this bill's even here, never mind what the members are saying about the bill and about stuff. They should be more worried about the bill itself.

And maybe some of the individuals on that side, maybe, you know, the Premier and the minister and the government will decide to give you guys an opportunity maybe to state your fact — do you support this or not — so I'm hoping, you know, you guys get together and you talk. But those members, you know, you have an opportunity. You're elected by the people and I hope, I hope there's an opportunity. And I would encourage you, you know, make your stand if you feel that way, if you're hearing that.

And I know that all I can say is, members on this side and that

side will get to vote, and individuals vote the way they want to vote. But I would encourage you to stop and do some thinking. Go back home and talk to your constituents, because it doesn't sound like there was a lot of time consulting.

[18:45]

Now, I'm going to get into this part of it because you have a government that really likes to pat itself on the back and talk about all the consultation they do. And then you have individuals like FSIN. You have different groups coming out very clearly saying they have not been consulted, that you have individuals who are saying they're tired of this government.

They like doing photo ops. Like you'll see them at certain events and they do the photo op. And when it comes to Indigenous people, they'll do the photo op. They show up at the events, they do the photo op, and then they go away. We don't see them for a long time till it's time for a photo op again. So maybe, you know, different ones. And I've heard Indigenous people say that. I've heard my family . . . We kind of chuckle about how you'll see politicians showing up once a year for the photo op because it's a certain day, and they show up and they do that and then they go and you don't hear.

Indigenous people want to have a say. They want to be having meaningful consultation. They want to be talked to. They want to have a say on their traditional territory.

Why don't you introduce legislation that gives teeth to that, to give First Nations and Métis the teeth? Come up with legislation. Why aren't we dealing with an emergency sitting and legislation? Like some of my colleagues articulated well the process and why wasn't this brought in a certain way and a certain time in a sitting. But we have to have a . . . This is what the government decided. This has to be what we make a stand on in an emergency sitting, and we have to have the notwithstanding clause. We have to do this. This is the one. This is the bill we have to do this on. I don't know why that is.

Why isn't it about affordability, the duty to consult and accommodate? Why don't we have other legislation that people are struggling with, with many different things — mental health, addictions, with affordability as I said, with the duty-to-consult and accommodate, with meaningful legislation. Why aren't we dealing with legislation and talking about those issues that help instead of having a debate on legislation Bill 137 about, you know, attacking someone's rights or using legislation to trample on their rights.

I cannot understand that, but I guess at the end of the day, you know, the government is going to do what the government does. You have been warned. People have asked you. Different organizations have sent letters. They've tried to be respectful. You've had individuals asking. You have members on this side asking you. I know sometimes we have disagreements, but they've asked you in a meaningful gesture to put the brakes on, consult, talk. You have that ability to do that. It's up to you as a government.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just don't want to get in the part where it's emotional and, you know, to be hurt because I'm trying to be respectful, but when I see the most vulnerable, the

most vulnerable in our province, the way they get treated by a government, a government that has such resources, that's had such a big majority, that can almost do anything . . . Why aren't we fixing affordability? Why aren't we fixing the homeless crisis? Why aren't we fixing mental health, the addictions? Not just putting band-aids on and saying, oh, we put a band-aid.

I've worked with individuals trying to get help and I'll continue to advocate. I'll do all I can. If somebody comes to me saying, I need help, can you help me, can you advocate, I will. I will do that because I do. I care. I care about individuals. And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope the members opposite will stop and put the brakes on, have a second look — truly will stop, put the brakes on, and have a second look at this legislation.

Now I've talked a bit about different parts of my own experience and, you know, our own families and what we go through. We put so much, both sides, members, their families give so much and support us to be here. And you know, we go home and we talk to our children, our grandchildren. And members opposite, you might do that as well. I know the stuff I'm hearing from my grandchildren and children. They're confused, wondering why this, like this special sitting. I've told them, well I've never been called back like this. Like I don't know why it had to be emergency session and stuff. And they're just wondering, like why are you going back; I thought you weren't going back till some other date. And I say, well no, the government has called back.

And we got the notice. And it was interesting when we got that notice that's what I thought, like what was it for? And then to understand, here's what it is. You know, what a disappointment that this is what we picked as a . . . you picked as a government — I don't say we; I want to be very clear — you picked as a government to bring forward that you needed to pass this. This is vital that needed . . . so important that you do this.

You know, I'm not going to go much on more. I said what I needed to say. I'm just going to say to individuals out there that this will trample on your rights and impact truly. From this mosôm, from this old guy, I just want to say, my heart goes out to those individuals, families who would struggle. To those families who may struggle or those individuals who may struggle, my heart goes out and I hope you find some peace and help and support within our province. And unfortunately, you know, this government seems to be moving ahead with it.

But I want to reassure individuals, I will not be supporting Bill 137, nor will my colleague who's Indigenous. As Indigenous . . . [inaudible] . . . we had a talk. We will not be supporting this bill. And I will be against it, 100 per cent do not support it. And you know, and I don't care. When it's time, I will not support this legislation that takes away individual rights and that has, government, so many groups telling you to stop and take a breather, whether it's the courts, whether it's organizations, whether it's the child advocate, whether your own commissioner of human rights resigning. Like I don't know who else can tell you where it's going.

But let's see where we go with it, what you're willing to do. But I just hope, and then I'm going to conclude. I hope those of you who don't put the brakes on, who don't question what's going on here, I truly hope your constituents hold you accountable.

Honestly I hope they hold you accountable. And at election time you'll either get the nod that you did good, or I guess, you know what, you get told what you did was the wrong way, you went the wrong way, you should have put the brakes on, people were warning you. Why didn't you just listen? Why didn't you just listen to common sense, people saying put the brakes on? Why did you have to push it?

So I'm going to leave it with that. I'm not going to say much more, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And on that note I'm prepared to adjourn debate on Bill 137.

The Deputy Speaker: — Yeah, you can't adjourn debate. Sorry. I recognize the member from Elphinstone-Centre.

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Usually I say, again it's a pleasure to be on my feet to speak to the bills that come before this Legislative Assembly, but being on my feet is no pleasure at all this evening.

I had not the pleasure, but I did have the honour yesterday to enter into debate on a motion moved by the Sask Party government to suspend the rules of this House, something we've never seen happen, something totally unprecedented, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So on that basis it was an honour to get some comments on the record to express my concern at the direction that this Sask Party government is taking.

I had an opportunity to speak to the ways in which I feel that this party and this government is eroding our democracy. And I tried to point very specifically to all three branches of our democracy: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I spoke about, you know, the fact that this is, yes, a tired, seemingly out-of-touch, seemingly out-of-ideas government. I'll add a little bit grumpy and scowling this evening to those characteristics, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We ordered some Thai; like, it lifted the mood. I don't know. Recommend it.

But they do have the element of surprise. They still have the ability to take my breath away, because I just can't believe that we are here today debating a bill that began as a policy that went before the courts and a judge very thoughtfully, very cautiously engaged in the arguments and the evidentiary record before him and said, okay, in a few months we're going to hear the substantive application; we can look at whether this violates the Charter rights of children but I'm satisfied, more than satisfied, that if we just steamroll ahead with this policy we could cause irreparable harm to children and youth. So he just said, let's press pause, everyone, because someone's going to get hurt or someone could get hurt. And surely that's reason enough to just press pause.

But nope. What was it, 10 minutes before we got a tweet from the Premier? Minutes. They're going to call us all back here. They're going to ram this policy through with legislation, and they're going to invoke the notwithstanding clause. I'm going to talk a bit about the notwithstanding clause in a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As a lawyer, as a legislator, as a mother, as a citizen of this province, that was gross, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That was difficult. This has been shocking, nothing short of shocking. So again I

will give it to them. I never thought I would find myself in this position, having this conversation on the heels of a motion that was passed subverting the democratic process so they could ram this bill through in, what, four days? I mean we are going to speak to this bill for as long as we possibly can, not because we're filibustering but because this government has said they didn't talk to any of the people that are going to be impacted by this bill.

The Children's Advocate said they didn't consult the rights holders, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They didn't consult the children. They didn't consult trans people. They didn't consult the LGBTQ2S+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, and two-spirit, plus] community. They didn't consult teachers. They didn't consult educators. They didn't consult school boards. They didn't consult parents — seven of eighteen, seven of eighteen maybe. They got some letters expressing support for the New Brunswick policy. That was the extent of their consultation.

So yes, we are going to stand here and speak to this bill and try our best to amplify the voices of the people who are increasing in number every day, the people that this government doesn't consider when they come into this building and make decisions that will impact them. That group of people that they're not listening to, it grows daily, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So we will continue to do what we can to amplify those voices, to consult with stakeholders, even though they're giving us four days to do it. No breaks to use the washroom, grab dinner, maybe take a phone call from a constituent or a stakeholder or a concerned parent. And the events of this week have been dizzying.

And I think they need to be concerned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the other thing I tried to touch on yesterday is, whatever you think about pronouns or trans people or the gender spectrum, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whatever you think about parental rights or parental inclusion, people are starting to wonder, well, isn't this getting a bit extreme? Aren't they going a bit far? I'm not sure I'm comfortable with this. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with recalling an emergency legislative sitting. What are they spending? Hundreds of thousands of dollars, just to do this? How many extra staff did we have to hire on to deal with this nonsense? I can't wait to get that bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can't wait to see that.

[19:00]

But people are wondering, isn't this getting a bit extreme? They're going to call back the legislature, spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to do it. They're going to change the procedural rules of this sacred House of democracy, rules that we've both agreed on each side for decades and decades are the rules that need to be in place so that we can bring some accountability, transparency to this process. We're going to just throw those out the window.

We're going to hastily draft a bill — very hastily drafted, very hastily indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and we're going to include the notwithstanding clause pre-emptively, pre-emptively. We didn't even wait until the courts had a look at the law, assessed whether this would violate Charter rights in a way that couldn't be saved under section 1. You know, that part about how limitations on people's rights can only go so far as could be acceptable in a free and democratic society, you know, that part.

Oh, far be it for them to wait for that part, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They pre-emptively invoked the notwithstanding clause. And again if that's not enough, I mean, we see things happening that I never thought that I would see happen. The resignation of a human rights commissioner, the resignation of a human rights commissioner who called this government out in such an honourable way, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Children, youth walking out of class today, spontaneously walking out of class and walking over to the legislature, sitting in the gallery . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Not spontaneously? Who orchestrated it? Oh, that's right because kids, you know, they don't have autonomy. They don't have rights. They don't think for themselves. They marched over here. They filled some of these galleries. They spoke on the outside of the steps. I never thought I would see the day where the children and youth of this province had to walk out of class to come petition their government to consider them in the drafting of their legislation. But they don't vote, I guess. They don't vote yet, and they will not forget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I stand before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, certainly with mixed emotions. I feel proud to stand with my colleagues, proud to have witnessed the critic for Education, the member from Saskatoon Eastview speak to this bill for seven hours. And they're all good hours.

I'm proud of the teaching profession in this province, the teachers that are standing up to this government, that are demanding better from this government.

I'm proud of the young people that are speaking out, the young people like we saw today who stood up, walked out of class, and came to their House of democracy, their Legislative Assembly to have their voices heard.

I'm proud of Heather Kuttai, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commissioner who didn't go quietly. She didn't go quietly at all, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I'm proud of the hundreds of people who have stepped forward to send us letters to read on the record during these proceedings, some of whom have joined us in the gallery this evening. I'm sure this is the last place that they'd like to be, but they're here with us tonight because they know this matters. And I'm proud of the outpouring of support and engagement we're seeing from every corner of the province.

But I'm also feeling ashamed. Today I'm ashamed to be a member of this Legislative Assembly on some level, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm ashamed to be participating in an abbreviated emergency sitting which is no more than a distraction that . . . It's a distraction, I mean, but let's be clear: the stakes are high. The stakes are high for the vulnerable kids that are being scapegoated by this government. But this is just a distraction, a distraction from their record, a distraction from their failures, a desperate attempt to distract, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I'm ashamed to be part of a Legislative Assembly where members are prepared to suspend the Charter rights of kids in order to ram through a garbage piece of partisan legislation where they can't even point to a single person that called for this or has

lived this. It's a slap in the face, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's what it is. It's a slap in the face. It makes a mockery of this place. It makes a mockery of our role. It is beneath our station. It is beneath our station.

And again because I'm going to come back to this a few times, because I want to keep reminding people what we're doing here and what we've done here, and to be more precise, what they have done. Because they are using their majority to do some pretty questionable things, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They introduced a motion to suspend the procedural rules of this House, and they're giving us now four days. We're going to sit between 9 and 11, no breaks — no breaks to use the bathroom; no breaks to eat; no breaks to take a call — in order to ram through a bill. And I hear the members chirping from their seats.

And this is the part that I really struggle with because it's not me. It's a judge — not an activist judge — someone who engaged with these issues very seriously and very cautiously and stuck to the evidentiary record and said, guys, please press pause because someone is going to get hurt.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do want to take a moment though to thank some people during this emergency sitting. I have a practicum student that has joined me this semester. She's not with us here tonight. But she was born in Nigeria; she's an international student. And she's been here in this Legislative Assembly observing proceedings, incidentally, for four days. And the first thing she said to me today was, oh my God, those people up in Hansard; this must be really hard for them. That was her first reaction, so I give her a lot of credit for that.

And I think that this emergency sitting is going to demand a lot of the staff of this Legislative Assembly and you know, they keep running the trains on time no matter what we throw at them.

So I do want to thank specifically the Hansard staff. The broadcast crew out there in the booth. I want to thank Linda and the cafe staff downstairs. Linda is such a mama to us all. She keeps us fed and watered.

I want to thank the cleaning staff. You know, and maybe this is a good time to do a shout-out to one of my constituents, Debbie McKenzie-Pelletier, who worked for years in this building as part of the cleaning crew before the Sask Party moved to privatize that and gave them, you know, pennies on the dollar. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the important work that they do. I want to thank the building operator, Steve Bata, Jeff Tochor, that crew.

The Clerks, of course. The library folks. I'm always emailing them with questions and demands, and they're always extremely prompt and effective, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope I haven't forgotten anyone. But I do think it's important that we thank the good people that work in the House, especially when we're demanding so much of them.

I want to thank the Sergeant-at-Arms and those sharply dressed crew that make sure that we're in when we're in and we're out when we need to be out. They keep us organized. The commissioners, of course, that greet us every day. Dani Herman and the legislative security crew.

And I want to give a special shout-out on that note to Carmen Head, a constituent, but also someone that works in this building as part of that team. I understand he's battling some tremendous health issues at the moment, so I want to just give him a big shout-out. I don't know him well but he's a friend of a friend, Warren McCall, and really he's a friend to us all if he works in this building, so I wanted to do that.

I also want to shout out to my new colleagues. The member from Coronation Park, he gave a wonderful maiden speech just now. From the heart, honest, forthright. And I honestly give him props any time I can because he has seven daughters, so he needs all the props he can get. Amazing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I'm going to start with the notwithstanding clause because there's been a lot of debate and discussion about that clause. I guess we'll start at the beginning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We'll start with the basics. I just want to read the provision from the Charter, from the Constitution, section 33. Sometimes we talk about these things but we actually don't go back to, you know, primary documents, foundational principles.

So under the section application of the Charter, section 32 is the application provision which indicates that the:

Charter applies

(a) to the Parliament and government of Canada in respect of all matters within the authority of Parliament including all matters relating to the Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories; and

(b) to the legislature and government of each province in respect of all matters within the authority of the legislature of each province.

So that's us. So we're guided by this document.

Exception where express declaration

33(1) Parliament or the legislature of a province may expressly declare in an Act of Parliament or of the legislature, as the case may be, that the Act or a provision thereof shall operate notwithstanding a provision included in section 2 or sections 7 to 15 of this Charter.

Incidentally, the Charter rights, the rights that are protected under the Charter, the Canadian Charter, that are at issue in this legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker: section 2, freedom of expression; section 7, the right to be safe and secure, security of the person; section 15, equality, non-discrimination.

Continuing on, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

33 Operation of exception

(2) An Act or a provision of an Act in respect of which a declaration made under this section is in effect shall have such operation as it would have but for the provision of this Charter referred to in the declaration.

So subsection (1) and (2) operate together basically to suspend the Charter when there is a law that breaches it, where the notwithstanding clause is put into place. I haven't done a very good job of explaining that, but we've got all night so I'm going to get another kick at the can.

Section 33(3). This is an interesting one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it is an express acknowledgement and inclusion and a nod to the fact that as part of our constitutional democracy there is an important role for the electorate. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a five-year limitation any time that the notwithstanding clause is invoked by a government, and that five-year limitation is not an accident. That is a nod to the fact that that's basically the maximum amount that a government will be in power before an election is called, putting it simply.

That's the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the interesting thing about the notwithstanding clause at this moment in time is that it's being invoked more and more. And I'm going to just turn to . . . Sorry, going back, I said I'd take another kick at the can, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

When a legislature activates the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they do so under section 33(1), which I just read out. And what is called the effects clause, that's subsection 33(2), temporarily ensures a law's operation. So the law in question can continue to operate notwithstanding the fact that it breaches Charter rights.

And again I want to say, not breaches . . . We have to be very clear about what that breach of a Charter right is because the Charter as it stands actually allows for some limitations on rights. I think one of my constitutional law professors put it aptly when he said the Charter recognizes that in order to make an omelette, we need to break a few eggs.

Under the Charter we recognize that there can be limitations on rights. And limitations is just sort of a soft word for violations of the rights. But they can be justifiable violations because under section 1 of the Charter, they have been found to be reasonable. It's a reasonable limitation on the right in a free and democratic society.

So the Charter already provides a mechanism to governments to infringe rights, but not in a way that goes beyond what is reasonable in a free and democratic society. In order to do that, in order to infringe the rights of your citizens in a way that is not reasonable in a free and democratic society, a government will have to turn to the notwithstanding clause. And I'll submit that that tells us a lot as an electorate of what we need to know about what this government is doing because again the Charter already provides a mechanism to limit rights as long as it's done in a way that's reasonable, as long as it's done in a way that is acceptable in a free and democratic society.

So as soon as a government is signalling to you that they will be invoking the notwithstanding clause, my suggestion is that your spidey senses should be tingling. Your spidey senses should be tingling as a citizen of Saskatchewan when your Premier comes to you and says, well if I need to invoke the notwithstanding clause, I will. Because we have a mechanism to limit rights as long as it's reasonable in a free and democratic society.

I told you I would be returning to the basics, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I am and I will be because I think it's important.

So when the notwithstanding clause is invoked, it protects the law in question — here a policy that requires parental consent before kids can go by the pronoun or name of their choice — even if that requirement, that law unjustifiably infringes Charter rights. And by unjustifiably I mean that a court has looked at section 1 and said that this is not a reasonable limitation on the right in a free and democratic society.

This also means that by invoking the notwithstanding clause the government, the Sask Party government, ensures that their pronoun bill, their pronoun policy that requires parental consent before kids can go by the name or pronoun of their choice, is precluded from any remedies under the Charter to cure the inconsistency with the Constitution, such as striking it down, such as reading it down, such as reading things in. These are some of the remedies that are available when a law unjustifiably violates Charter rights.

And a lot of people have been asking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether this decision on the part of the Sask Party government to pre-emptively invoke the notwithstanding clause . . . Because let's all remember that the decision of Justice Megaw was a decision in response to a request for an injunction, interlocutory relief, an injunction to just pause the policy so that the substantive hearing could take place, where the court could actually look at whether this policy violates rights.

Typically what you'll see from governments intent on invoking the notwithstanding clause is they'll wait until after a court says, we've looked at it; we've considered it; this violates Charter rights in a way that's not justifiable, so you can't do this. But not the Sask Party government. Not our Premier. Not our Minister of Education, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They pre-emptively invoked the notwithstanding clause, which probably should be a signal to people they know full well that this piece of legislation will not pass a judge's scrutiny. It will not be in line with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A lot of people have asked, well now that they pre-emptively invoked the notwithstanding clause, they've asked, well will this preclude the court from looking at the bill? And I see the House Leader, he's saying maybe, maybe not. I don't know if it's in response to this. Because it's actually a really interesting legal question.

Oh, the former minister of Health just pointed out that he's not listening. I thought he was listening and sort of agreeing that it was an interesting question of law, but apparently no. He's watching football or something, I don't know. I don't know. What's he doing? You're the one who just said he's not listening. Sorry. The former minister of Health just said he's not listening. I don't know what he's doing. Apparently he's not listening. His words, not mine.

Anyway I'll continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So people have asked whether . . . And this is the interesting legal question . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Sorry? I can't hear you. Okay. A declaration . . . A lot of people have asked whether this means

the court won't look any further at whether this law is unconstitutional because they've pre-emptively enacted the notwithstanding clause. I think it's a question for debate, but the answer is probably . . . Well the answer is no, that's not necessarily the case. The court can still look at this piece of legislation.

And I'll submit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the court probably will opt to look at this piece of legislation. Because when we're talking about the public interest, when we're talking about the electorate's stake in understanding the content of a law, when we're talking about a violation, a potential violation of the rights of vulnerable children who are particularly vulnerable, I might add, in a democracy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they can't vote.

And that's why Canada is a signatory to the UN charter, the UN charter of rights of children — I'm getting the term wrong — the United Nations charter, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because kids can't vote, so they are particularly vulnerable in a democracy. And we have agreed as a community that we need to ensure that there are extra checks and balances in place to protect them and to make sure that their rights are respected by a government that doesn't necessarily have to answer to them in the electoral process, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I actually can't think of a case where a court would be more likely to say, yeah, you pre-emptively enacted the notwithstanding clause, but we think we still need to put eyes on this legislation because the rights of vulnerable kids . . . not just vulnerable kids by virtue of being kids who don't vote, but vulnerable kids by virtue of the fact that there's evidence that trans and gender-nonconforming kids are more likely to be homeless, are more likely to have mental health challenges, to suffer from suicidality. So this is a particularly vulnerable subset of a vulnerable demographic.

So unlike section 1, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to return to this one more time, section 33 has absolutely nothing to say. It can tell us nothing at all about whether the violation of the rights in question are justifiable, are reasonable, are consistent with a democracy, are consistent with a free democracy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[19:30]

And again the decision of this Sask Party government to invoke the notwithstanding clause at this stage signals that they know exactly what this legislation does. They know that it breaches the rights of children in a way that cannot be saved in a free and democratic society but they are going to ram this through anyway.

And it's an interesting time from the perspective of the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because as of half a decade ago, as of like half a decade ago, Canada's notwithstanding clause — and I stand to be corrected and maybe I will be corrected — had gathered dust for 35 years, except in Quebec and Saskatchewan.

Now Quebec is its own sort of case when it comes to the notwithstanding clause, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'll come to that in a moment. But my understanding is that the only other time that the notwithstanding clause had been invoked in

Saskatchewan had been by Grant Devine in the '80s. There was a dairy strike, I understand, and there was legislation brought forward to prohibit the rotating strikes that were planned. And then of course, the most recent example before this, of course, would be Brad Wall in 2017, although that legislation was never proclaimed.

So it's interesting, because in looking at the other places where we've seen a, I mean, and like I said, this was as of half a decade ago, this was very rare. We've seen a huge uptick in use of the notwithstanding clause, always by conservative governments, historically and presently. I mean let's call a spade a spade, Mr. Deputy Speaker, always by conservative governments. The small government freedom fighters, they love the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I think it bears noting that Brad Wall sort of flirted with the idea of the notwithstanding clause on another occasion, and that was when his essential services legislation was struck down, where the Supreme Court, in a stunning victory for working people across Canada, won the right to strike. We kind of always knew it was a right enshrined under the Charter, but it wasn't until a court case prompted by the essential services legislation of Brad Wall till the Supreme Court came out and said it.

And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's an interesting reminder about how, when governments really push their luck, when they really push the envelope, that can backfire spectacularly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I wonder if that's something. I wonder if that's an ongoing discussion over in that Sask Party caucus.

You know, there are risks here. There are risks in terms of what legal precedent this might set because there is a lot being written right now about how to interpret section 33, really, how to interpret the notwithstanding clause, particularly when we see a total abandonment of this tradition where governments were very loath to use this clause. They're very . . . It wasn't approached and invoked and threatened with the same casualness of conservative governments of today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And of course the Charter is a living, breathing document, and it tends to try to balance things out in a democracy. I wonder if they're thinking about those things over there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And that's just on the legal front. The other thing that can happen when governments take very rash and over-the-top action is that a population that has previously been, you know, pretty supportive — things are ticking along; they're doing okay, I guess, not really paying attention, super busy — might start paying attention. I wonder if they're thinking about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So it's sort of a reminder. You know, I take the example of Doug Ford. You know, going back to Brad Wall, yeah, he kind of threatened to use the notwithstanding clause when it came to the essential services legislation, and it didn't come to that. Then you take an example like Doug Ford, a man that is perhaps lacking the intelligence of Brad Wall, the knack for taking the popular temperature. He did decide to fight that fight, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think there were several occasions where Doug Ford either threatened to use the notwithstanding clause or actually used it although, you know, in the case of education workers, Mr. Speaker, there was a spectacular back walking at the last minute. You know, he picked that fight and he lost, Mr.

Deputy Speaker.

But again it's a reminder of how these moments, as maddening as this is perhaps to the opposition, as divided as people seem and how that doesn't feel good to see that happening in the population . . . We see it happening in the United States. We see some of the same tactics being used here, and we see that it's working to some extent. We see, you know, the tenor and the quality of debate take a hit maybe, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But my hope is, out of these debates, these moments can be moments that shift the population, shift the communities around them, prompt really important debates, really important questions about the role of government, about what we should be doing here in this place, about what we could be doing to help people maybe a little more. It might be a moment where, you know, apathy takes a bit of a hit and people start to give a bit more of a damn. I don't know. It's just a thought.

And it bears noting that when public opinion shifts, it can do so very quickly and very dramatically, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think that one of the things that's happening out there is people are taking notice. Not because they particularly care, you know, what name or pronoun kids are called in schools. I think they're taking notice because of the heavy-handed tactics that we're seeing from this government, the decision to ram things through, the decision to suspend the usual democratic rules, the decision to spend four days debating this bill.

So just by way of making sure that I've covered the bases, I was referencing Doug Ford's, Premier Ford's decision to invoke the notwithstanding clause more recently. That was 2022. That was out of a dispute that the government was having with the Canadian Union of Public Employees there, over the union's demand for an 11 per cent annual pay raise for 55,000 education assistants, early childhood educators, custodians, and administrative assistants.

And when you saw the salaries that these folks were making in this cost-of-living crisis, it was . . . I can understand why the membership got really engaged, and why they ultimately won the day. You know, they had the public support. But of course we know that Ontario introduced back-to-work legislation, and as part of that legislation, Doug Ford included the notwithstanding clause. But at the last minute, he backed off.

But it did prompt some interesting commentary on the notwithstanding clause and the use of the notwithstanding clause in recent times, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'm just going to go to one article where . . . This is a Peter Zimonjic article, "The notwithstanding clause — what it is, why it was used, and what happens next." And there's a section of this article that says, "What does Ford's use of the clause mean going forward?"

The repeated use of the clause in recent years has some warning that it could become a commonplace tool for governments. In June 2021 Ontario invoked the clause for the first time in the province's history [the first time in the province's history, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2021] to limit third-party election financing. The Ford government threatened to use it in 2018 to uphold his plan to reduce the number of seats on Toronto City Council before the courts sided with his government on the cut.

François Legault's government [this is the CAQ (Coalition Avenir Québec) government, another conservative government, Mr. Deputy Speaker] in Quebec pre-emptively invoked the notwithstanding clause to support Bill 21, which bans the wearing of religious symbols by workers in the public sector, and Bill 96, the government's new language laws.

Experts told CBC News that Canadians should expect to see governments use the clause again:

Once you breach that norm, once you cross that bridge and you look to see what are the political consequences, and if the political consequences don't seem to be very strong for the government, then unfortunately what you see is a temptation to use it.

Now that article referenced Bill 21 that the Quebec government also invoked the notwithstanding clause regarding. And it's interesting to hear the Premier, the Justice minister, talk with a lot of affection for Quebec and their approach to things these days. Very enamoured, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We saw that . . . was it *Drawing the Line* document, the nation within a nation? That rhetoric has sort of fizzled out. I don't know. Yet we've got it in here with us today. I haven't been hearing a lot from the Premier about the separatism project.

But you know, it's interesting to look at Quebec because of course they have a unique relationship with the notwithstanding clause. They've invoked it a number of times. Now they'll say, you know, they're somewhat justified because at the 11th hour they were excluded from talks and stabbed in the back and all of that. But you know, it's important context for Quebec's approach to the notwithstanding clause.

Now it doesn't . . . I guess where I'm going with this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it's very interesting to see the Premier really express an affinity to Quebec's approach to these matters given the history. And I think it's important to look at how Quebec has used the notwithstanding clause in recent times because I think there are actually a lot of parallels with how the notwithstanding clause is being invoked with Bill No. — just wanted to make sure I had it right — 137.

Bill 21, a ban on the hijab. And again, this is a secularism law, it's called, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that prohibits public school teachers, police officers, government lawyers, a host of other civil servants, and even some politicians from wearing religious symbols at work.

[19:45]

Now yes, it's a blanket ban that doesn't specifically call out Muslim women in the legislation, but we all know that it has the effect of specifically targeting Muslim women that wear the hijab. The province in that situation . . . Interesting fun fact, interesting parallel because we're looking at the protection of minority rights here: vulnerable kids, Muslim women who wear the hijab. In that case as well, although it's very rare to do, we saw the pre-emptive invoking of the notwithstanding clause. So I'm not surprised to hear the Premier express so much affection and affinity for Quebec's approach to the notwithstanding clause. He is obviously taking notes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I did, in preparing for my remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, go down a bit of a rabbit hole in terms of reading up on the notwithstanding clause. But I think it's really important because I think, again we've seen all this heated activity around the notwithstanding clause over these last five years. You know, in a place like Ontario where it had never been relied on before, we saw suddenly Doug Ford come forward and invoke it a number of times. And even in Quebec we've seen a shift in terms of how the notwithstanding clause is being invoked and when it is being invoked.

And I'm going to suggest that it may . . . You know, arguably it's one thing to invoke the notwithstanding clause to protect the minority language of a people who have a claim to an autonomous culture, a founding community of Canada. That's maybe one thing. But when you're then invoking the notwithstanding clause to target vulnerable minorities like Muslim women who wear the hijab, you have lost the plot, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have lost the plot. You are no longer invoking the notwithstanding clause to ostensibly protect a minority in a majority. You are using the notwithstanding clause to attack a minority, which is precisely what the Government of Saskatchewan, the Premier, the Sask Party government is doing with this legislation.

So again, I am not surprised at all to hear the Premier and the Justice minister stand up and love in on Quebec because they are taking the same approach. Not just in terms of this attack on minority rights, but in terms of pre-emptively trying to shield these unjustifiable laws from judicial scrutiny by pre-emptively invoking the notwithstanding clause. And I guess that is where I was trying to go with my comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to go to another article, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an article written by Robert Leckey. Robert Leckey is an interesting guy. He is the dean of McGill law school. He is a scholar of constitutional law, of family law. I believe he clerked for one of the Supreme Court judges; I can't remember which one. He's on the Bastarache Commission.

And he taught me family law. He also taught constitutional law when I was in school, but I didn't get him as a prof but I used to sneak into his class and listen at the back. So I was essentially like attending two different lectures of constitutional law because he's just the kind of guy that's sort of like terrifyingly brilliant. And he's written at length about the notwithstanding clause in recent years.

And it's such an interesting, also collision — if I may say — of his two interests, this pronoun bill. Obviously he's a family law specialist — you know, he has lots of practice looking at the best interests of the child and how that should be the guiding principle in all things legal when it comes to family law — and then as well he's a constitutional law expert.

Anyway, back in 2021, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Robert Leckey wrote a piece for *The Toronto Star* and I want to read from it. This is again about Premier Doug Ford's use of the notwithstanding clause:

In a bill expected to be tabled Thursday, Premier Doug Ford's government will invoke the notwithstanding clause in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. When

elected lawmakers make a law operate despite our fundamental rights and freedoms, we have a collective duty to scrutinize the proceedings, writes Robert Leckey.

In a bill expected to be tabled Thursday, Premier Doug Ford's government will invoke the notwithstanding clause in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The aim is to allow restrictions on third-party political advertising to operate, despite a judge's ruling they violate the Charter's guarantee of freedom of expression.

Professor Leckey then goes on to look at two aspects of section 33. First of all he points out, as I've already maybe stated, that this is the first time in Ontario's history that the notwithstanding clause was being used.

In discussing the use of the notwithstanding clause, distinguishing two matters is crucial [writes Robert Leckey]. The first is timing.

The first is timing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is something that I've at least tried to talk about.

The notwithstanding clause can be used after an unfavourable court ruling, as in the Ontario case. Or it can be used pre-emptively through enactment of a law, as in the Quebec example.

Quebec's example that I gave earlier was the ban on religious symbols which targeted Muslim women who wear the hijab.

The second matter [writes Robert Leckey] is the scope of protection activated by the legislature. Does the legislature make its law operate notwithstanding one or two specified rights that might plausibly conflict with the law? Or does it push aside the full range of guarantees potentially subject to the notwithstanding clause?

Robert Leckey goes on in this article to distinguish two concepts that he invites us to sort of keep at the front of our mind when we're scrutinizing a government's decision to invoke the notwithstanding clause. And he invites us to distinguish between what is — I'm paraphrasing — what is lawful and what is right because those aren't always the same things. And he writes: "While a court cannot strike down a protected law, it may" . . . Sorry, that's a different part.

Fundamentally, increasingly casual use of the notwithstanding clause is a wake-up call to civil society organizations, journalists, and the voting public. As a part of the Constitution of Canada, the notwithstanding clause can be used legally. Ford's majority at Queen's Park assures that he can do so in the coming days.

Man, we could just substitute, "Scott Moe's, Premier Moe's majority ensures that he can invoke the legislation in the coming days." We've been clear as the opposition . . . I'm sorry.

The Deputy Speaker: — Yes. Yes.

Ms. Conway: — I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will not refer to this by his name again. Sorry. The Premier of Saskatchewan, that's better. But, writes Robert Leckey:

The exercise of a power may be legal without it being legitimate. What elements would make a use of the notwithstanding clause legitimate? Canadians haven't debated this question enough and it matters. Voters are the ultimate judges of how their elected representatives respect fundamental rights. For some, the notwithstanding clause's place in the Charter makes any use of it by elected lawmakers legitimate.

And I would submit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that from the comments of the Premier of Saskatchewan, we can glean that his approach to the notwithstanding clause is, well it's in there so I can use it; it's in there, so why not; I'm fine to use this clause because it's in there.

The better view [argues Robert Leckey] is that other factors are relevant. What are the reasons for using the notwithstanding clause? Do they support a vision of the public good or do they reflect partisan or electoral self-interest? How severe is the impact on the minorities whose protection from majoritarian oppression is the reason we entrenched the Charter? Is the government making rights trade-offs differently from the courts or showing contempt for rights? How broad a range of voices was heard during the legislative process?

I would submit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if we answered every single one of these questions posed by Robert Leckey, if we asked every single one of these questions, the answer would be pretty damning for this government. What are the reasons for using the notwithstanding clause?

Well that's a little tough because it's not in response to a court's ruling. Do they support a vision of the public good or do they reflect partisan or electoral self-interest? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a pretty persuasive theory out there that this piece of legislation is no more than a response to the erosion of political support for the Sask Party that we saw play out in the Lumsden-Morse election. So that's pretty much as partisan as it gets.

How severe is the impact on the minorities whose protection from majoritarian oppression is the reason we entrenched the Charter in the first place? Again when we take Quebec's example, it's one thing to enact the notwithstanding clause to protect a minority language group — and many argue that it's not okay in that situation either. But it's one thing to enact the notwithstanding clause to protect a minority in a majority. It's quite another to enact the notwithstanding clause so that you can railroad the Charter rights of vulnerable kids. That's a little different, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

How broad a range of voices was heard during the legislative process? Again this is a government that can't point to a school division, to an LGBTQS+ group that gave them feedback, to speaking to any trans person, to speaking to any gender-nonconforming child, to speaking to any teacher or educator. They can't point to a single one. And that's not just me saying that. That's right there in the Children's Advocate's report, that there was a lack of consultation, that these stakeholders were not spoken to, consulted.

And when we talk about the legislative process, oh, the four-day

legislative process? The one where the Sask Party government has suspended the usual procedural rules of this House? Oh, that legislative process? Again if we answer this question, it's a pretty damning answer for that government.

I'm going to take a break from the notwithstanding clause, but I'm actually going to come back to it later. But I want to switch gears here for a moment because of that last question: how broad a range of voices was heard during this legislative process? So as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and as the Sask Party government knows and as the observing public knows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we put a call out for letters. We put a call out for letters because we knew that they were going to abbreviate this sitting. They were going to do everything they could to ram through this legislation. We knew they hadn't consulted with stakeholders, and so we put out a call for letters. And like the response has been pretty overwhelming actually.

[20:00]

And I want to start with a letter from Dr. Gwen Grinyer, who's actually in the gallery with us tonight. Am I saying it right? Grinyer? Grinyer? Grinyer. Dr. Grinyer is a nuclear physicist. She's a nuclear physicist. She's the first trans woman physicist in Canada. She is an associate professor at the U of R [University of Regina]. Her research interests include nuclear structure and astrophysics of rare isotopes, neutral — oh God, I knew I was going to struggle with this — neutrinoless double beta decay. I'm just going to read her bio from the University of Regina website:

My research uses beams of rare isotopes to study the properties of short-lived radioactive nuclei located furthest from stability. [I think this is really cool. I kind of wish the other side would listen.] The structure of these exotic nuclei are essential for understanding how the nuclear force evolves towards the extremes of nucleonic matter and for describing the observed abundances of stable nuclei in the universe that are produced in explosive astrophysical scenarios, such as X-ray bursts, supernovae, and neutron-star mergers. My research spans a broad range of topics, including ultra-high precision measurements to test the standard models description of electroweak interactions, high-resolution gamma ray and charged particle spectroscopy to study in-beam reactions and decays of exotic nuclei, and designing state-of-the-art instrumentation to be able to study the rarest isotopes whose production rates are at the limits of feasibility.

Isn't it amazing that we have this kind of work? I can't explain what that means. I don't think anyone can explain what that means except for Dr. Grinyer, who's here with us today and I am so thankful that she is. And I want to congratulate her on her most recent publication in *Nature Communications*.

So I want to read from Dr. Grinyer's letter here. It's dated October 3rd, and I'm just going to read it into the record from beginning to end:

To whom it may concern:

I learned from a few friends and colleagues that you are soliciting stories and experiences in order to oppose the Saskatchewan government pronoun policy and the

Premier's plan to invoke the notwithstanding clause. I'm an associate professor in the department of physics at the University of Regina, but more importantly I'm also the first trans woman physicist in Canada.

I'm an author, a teacher, an advocate, and have spoken publicly to youth and university-aged students in the province about my journey and how I overcame childhood trauma to become a successful scientist.

Earlier this year, I wrote a personal article about my story and my experiences in *Discourse* magazine. Part of the story mentions the physical abuse I faced at home from my father, who was not accepting of my identity. My mother, while not physically abusive, was also not supportive. This led me to question and blame myself for my identity and I developed a deep sense of shame, which then brought me to within days of taking my own life.

I knew I would end up homeless if I came out to my parents, so I kept quiet until I could support myself. As an adult, I don't have a relationship with my parents. My dad passed away without ever getting to know who I am and without ever getting to see how successful I've become. My mom chose to support my abusive dad. She didn't listen to me, which is something I will never be able to forgive.

My home wasn't an exception. I've done the research, and the fact is that 66 per cent of LGBTQ+ youth come from households that don't accept their queer or trans identity. I've also become aware of the suicide rates for LGBTQ+ youth and how 45 per cent have seriously considered it in just the past year alone. I know that suicide rates drop by 40 per cent if these youths have just one adult in their life who accepts them. And more often than not, this is their teacher. I know that trans and nonbinary youth who reported having their pronouns respected all or most of the time attempt suicide at half the rates of those who don't. This policy effectively forces teachers to misgender those youth if they don't have parental consent, which is directly linked to increased suicide rates for trans youth.

For the government to ignore these data, to forego any kind of consultation phase with health care professionals and community experts, and to then knowingly dismiss the potential human rights violations that this policy may cause by invoking the notwithstanding clause, is to let these youth die by their own hand.

As a survivor, this is unimaginable to me, and my heart breaks for every kid who has to go through what I did, especially those who won't make it to adulthood as a direct result of this policy. Please read my article above for more information. The statistics I quoted in this letter can be found at The Trevor Project.

And she provides a link.

I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that rather than read Dr. Grinyer's piece, "My identity is my superpower," into the record, I will table this document with the Legislative Assembly with the hopes that my colleagues on the other side will read Dr. Grinyer's story.

The stakes are real, and the stakes are high. This government can't point to a single human being that has come forward to say: this happened to me, mad as heck, and I need this legislation to pass. Here is a human being, a scholar, a mother, a pillar of our community. Her words are . . . her words should stop this government in their tracks. Her words should stop us all in our tracks and press pause. Just press pause. That's all we're asking on this side. Justice Megaw, that's all that he asked for, just press pause. Someone could get hurt. No one is trying to fearmonger.

You know, we had a mother, we had a mother here last week who lost her gender-nonconforming child, who said if the supports were there, things might have been different. These aren't hypothetical scenarios. And I just can't understand why we're even risking the possibility that we might come back to this Chamber in a few months from now to learn that someone has been hurt, someone has suffered, or someone has died. It's not hyperbole. It's not fearmongering. It's a very real possibility. It is a very real risk, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that is the message of Dr. Grinyer. It could happen.

Why are we playing with fire? Why are we even risking this? We know . . . You know, there was a national action group by gender-nonconforming youth in Canada. They put together a document looking at what they needed to feel safe and good and secure in schools. I'm trying to find it here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's very telling. This was a forum where youth from across the country came together and it's called the Pride Guide 2022, and I understand some students from Knoll participated. And the purpose of this guide is to present a collection of strategies that address some of the most common challenges in navigating the physical, psychological, and emotional spaces within schools.

And what these youth said, they have a whole section on inclusive language and the importance of pronouns, the harm of deadnaming. They've told us what they need. They just need a safe place.

They have a chart in here about what teachers should and shouldn't do, and I'm just going to read from this section on teachers:

As teens, our lives centre on school, work, home, and our faith communities. If we don't feel safe at school, that is a significant part of our lives to continually fear or juggle anxiety around. By helping to promote strong mental health through creating places that we feel safe, 2SLGBTQ+ students can thrive.

And they say:

Teachers should begin the semester with a *private* survey asking the preferred names/pronouns of all students. Teachers should not refuse to use correct pronouns and/or names.

Except under this policy, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and this is something that the Advocate for Children and Youth has identified — if a youth comes forward asking to go by a different name and pronoun, and their peer comes forward asking to go by a different name and pronoun, and their peer has parental consent to go by that pronoun and name and they don't, they have to sit through class being deadnamed while their peer gets to be who

they want to be.

[20:15]

That's the reality. And incidentally, the Advocate for Children and Youth said that violates their human rights.

Teachers should check with the students to see where they are out and where they are not. Teachers should not out students without their permission.

And this opposition has been concerned from day one that this legislation could lead to outing children without their permission. And I don't think they've even contemplated all of the scenarios. It's very vague, you know.

Does a teacher have to ask permission from a parent if they see the child maybe not ask to go by another pronoun but express a different gender in another way? Does the teacher have to ask permission if they see the student's peers refer to them by a different name or pronoun? Does the teacher have to ask permission if they see that the student is identifying themselves this way but doesn't necessarily come to them and ask them? I mean, you're just creating such a situation of stress and fear and uncertainty. And for what?

You know, the Saskatchewan government had started to develop policies on this. And I'm not saying it was perfect, but one thing I will say is that the safety of the child, the concern of the child, was at the forefront of the development of those policies. But when it comes to this bill, this piece of legislation, they didn't even do a children's rights impact assessment. They didn't even do a children's rights impact assessment, to the extent that the Children's Advocate has done one and added it as an appendix to her report. And I think I'll table that later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is not rocket science. We're all trying to find our way through this, you know. And this is not helping. It's going to make it worse. And for what? I want to thank Dr. Grinyer for her courage in writing down her story and coming to the legislature today to share it with us. And I hope that the members opposite will take it to heart and perhaps read the more in-depth piece about her journey.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I got a surprise in my inbox. I was delighted, actually. I'm just trying to find it here. I got a submission from a group of students at a legal clinic in Manitoba who wanted their letter to be read into the record.

This is the Rights Clinic at Robson Hall at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Law. They have penned a letter to the members of this Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. The subject of this letter is: Submission to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan regarding Bill 137, *An Act to amend the Education Act, 1995 respecting parental rights*.

To the members of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan:

It is with grave concern for the rights of youth in Saskatchewan that the Rights Clinic at Robson Hall, a progressive legal clinic within the University of Manitoba Faculty of Law, makes the following comments to the

Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.

The provincial Government of Saskatchewan is responsible for making laws in the interests of residents, including youth. We submit that the anti-transgender school policy put forth by the government is harmful and will further marginalize gender-diverse youth. Instead of creating policies that have significant harmful effects, we call on the provincial government to protect all youth by establishing inclusive policies that foster safe spaces which would improve community diversity and acceptance.

In 2016, the University of British Columbia's Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre conducted a nationwide health survey of transgender youth participants. In the Prairies, including Saskatchewan, the rate of attempted suicide by transgender youth was 50 per cent, which is distressing and significantly higher than the national average.

Similarly, the rate of self-harm by transgender youth in the Prairies was 60 per cent. Along with the increased risks of self-harm, transgender youth, especially those who live in the Prairies, are at greater risk of substance dependency and addiction, are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse, and are more likely to be experiencing poverty.

In short, as a cohort, transgender youth constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in the province. That Bill 137 would knowingly infringe upon the rights of one of the most vulnerable groups in the province, while pre-emptively invoking the shielding offered by the notwithstanding clause in an attempt to prevent impacted youth from seeking protection through the courts, is deplorable.

The Rights Clinic at Robson Hall was founded with the goal of protecting and advancing Charter rights. Implicit in this opposition is the concerning trend of politicizing rights. It is vital to bear in mind that, as per Justice La Forest's comments in *McKinney v. University of Guelph*, the Charter is meant to be "essentially an instrument for checking the powers of government over the individual."

If individuals' rights are reduced to the point that they are merely what partisan politicians tell them they are, the future is indeed dismal for Saskatchewan and for Canada more generally. The Supreme Court of Canada held in *Reference re Secession of Quebec*:

... one of the key considerations [this is at paragraph 81] motivating the enactment of the *Charter*, and the process of constitutional judicial review that it entails, is the protection of minorities. However, it should not be forgotten that the protection of minority rights had a long history before the enactment of the *Charter*. Indeed, the protection of minority rights was clearly an essential consideration in the design of our constitutional structure, even at the time of Confederation ... Although Canada's record of upholding the rights of minorities is not a spotless one, that goal is one towards which Canadians have been striving since Confederation, and the process has not been without successes. The principle of protecting minority rights continues to exercise influence

in the operation and interpretation of our Constitution.

We would respectfully encourage members of the Legislative Assembly to work toward, rather than in opposition to, the protection of minority rights. Children are not and must not be perceived as chattel. Schools must be safe spaces for youth to grow and learn more about who they are as individuals. The notion of safer schools does not include policies that target and further stigmatize marginalized transgender and queer youth. When schools or organizations provide educational materials and safe spaces for youth to gain a comprehensive understanding of gender and sexual diversity and identity, they are being educated and protected.

It has been proven that providing safe spaces for youth significantly reduces their risk of self-harm. As such, the Rights Clinic at Robson Hall implores members of the Legislative Assembly to reject Bill 137. The rights, health, and lives of vulnerable children should not be jeopardized for partisan political gain.

I want to thank the students at the Rights Clinic at Robson Hall at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Law for sending me that submission.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I read more of these letters into the record, I want to speak a bit specifically, more specifically, about the legislation. I just don't want to lose these letters. I'm going to turn to it now.

The review done by the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth ... You know, I mentioned earlier, and I made a note in my mind to come back to this: the lack of children's rights impact assessment that was done in this case. And I was interested to read about all of the situations where this legislation might conflict with other legislation of this government.

As noted by myself and by others, this was clearly a bill that was drafted in a hurry. There are some major issues with that, and I know that the Education minister is going to delve into that a little more in committee. And of course my colleague the member for Regina Douglas Park, the critic for Justice, is going to take a closer look. But it bears noting that this policy, which requires the consent of parents before a child can go by a different noun or pronoun ... Well let me start at the beginning.

The Children's Advocate has noted, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a policy that denies the ability of a child or youth to go by a pronoun or youth, particularly legislation that doesn't provide for that moving scale that ... You know, children are not just children one day and then wake up adults. There is a spectrum. And as they approach adulthood, they get more and more autonomy, more and more ... Their rights take on a different form, shall we say, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we see that in the family law context, where when children are quite young, barring some exceptional situation, both parents have equal access to their kids. But as kids get older, they turn 11, 12, 13, their preference actually holds a lot of sway if they want live with one parent or the other or spend more time with them. And that's why we have, you know, mature minor exceptions in the health care context. It's because the law

recognizes that we don't flip a switch. A child is not a child one day and then an adult the next. There is a spectrum as they age, as they become more and more mature and have more and more autonomy.

And of course the Advocate for Children and Youth outlines in great detail how prohibiting school staff from using children's pronoun or name of choice is a violation of the Charter. It is a violation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child — sorry, I was forgetting “convention” before, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The advocate has consistently recommended that the Government of Saskatchewan and its various ministries discharge their duties under that convention in conducting a children's rights impact assessment, whenever amending or developing legislation.

And you know, I see the Minister for Advanced Education sitting here, the former Justice minister. He knows this, that when new legislation or policies are developed that would impact children, we do a children's rights impact assessment. We look at how that's going to impact the rights of children.

In the view of the advocate, it was incumbent on the Ministry of Education to conduct such an impact assessment in this case, given that this policy directly impacts on the rights of children and youth, but they did not. And in the words of the advocate, on page 14:

The ministry has advised that its intent was to balance the rights of students and of parents/guardians to support children, but did not indicate that it had conducted a comprehensive evaluation on how the policy would impact the legal rights of young people in our province.

In light of this apparent omission, our office engaged a children's rights impact assessment to fill this gap.

[20:30]

As this children's rights impact details, in addition to the likely violations under provincial and federal law [the Charter, the human rights code], the policy violates the rights of children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada in 1991, and by extension the provinces and territories:

not to be discriminated against on the basis of gender identity and expression;

to have their best interests given primary consideration in decisions that affect them;

to be heard and have their opinions given due consideration [they violated that right under the convention as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker];

to receive and benefit from an education;

to have and maintain their own identity;

to privacy;

to be free from violence and harm; and potentially even,

their right to life and survival.

So when the members opposite scoff or look askance when we stand here and we talk about the risk to life that this legislation could have, this is not hyperbole. This is not fearmongering. This is an opinion that is shared by experts, by the trans community who have lived through this process of coming out and in many cases in living in a world where you're not accepted for who you are.

The Children's Advocate, as I said, conducted their own children's rights impact assessment. And it was only the second time that I read the report that I even had the presence of mind to notice this and to read it, and it was extremely interesting. And I'm going to go through it for the benefit of this Legislative Assembly.

Because basically, what the children's rights impact assessment does is it goes through . . . it has a policy overview and then it looks at each of these protected rights and grounds under the United Nations convention of the child and looks at any positive impact on those rights that this policy might have and any negative impact that this policy might have.

I'll just read the final paragraph. I don't want to be repetitive. Page 27 of the report is where the appendix, the child rights impact assessment, begins. The last paragraph of the first section, “Policy overview”:

The Ministry of Education has stated that the policy arose in response to “concerns raised by Saskatchewan parents about needing to be notified and included in their children's education.” However the Ministry of Education had not engaged in a comprehensive analysis of how the introduction of this policy would impact the rights and interests of children and youth in Saskatchewan schools.

And then the Children's Advocate goes on:

About child rights impact assessments

Canada was one of the leading nations in the development and drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1991. As such, all governments in Canada, including the Government of Saskatchewan, are considered duty bearers under the convention. Governments bear a duty to protect and promote the rights of children. This duty extends to undertaking “all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the convention” including the use of the child rights impact assessment as early as possible in the development of law and policy.

A child rights impact assessment is a systematic assessment of the potential impacts, both [as I said, both] positive and negative, of policies, programs, legislation, or other actions on the rights and well-being of children. The purpose is to ensure decision makers consider how this full spectrum of children's rights may be impacted and using this information, make decisions in their best interest.

[They've] . . . been used in various jurisdictions throughout Canada and internationally to highlight the potential or real

impacts on children, both positive and negative, of changes to legislation and/or policy. More recently, the federal Department of Justice has developed a CRIA template and online training module to promote the use of CRIA across government departments. Several law societies, including the Law Society of Saskatchewan, endorse this tool and offer credits for professional development for completing this course.

So I want to go through each of the articles that the Children's Advocate has identified as being activated by this legislation. My words, not hers. The first is article 2, the commitment to non-discrimination under the convention.

The policy pertains explicitly to "students who wish to change their pronouns and/or preferred first name to align with their gender identity." As such, the question of potentially discriminatory treatment, the focus of article 2 of the UNCRC is highly relevant to this analysis.

She starts with the positive impacts of the policy:

The policy would support the more equitable treatment of transgender children and youth, provided they are able to obtain parental consent using form 1 or, if over the age of 16, are able to complete form 1 themselves. It guarantees respect for the gender identity and expression of at least a subset of young people, including in those schools that may not have previously had affirming policy in this regard.

So in other words, the kids who get consent get to go by the pronouns and names of their choice, which inherently respects their human rights and their dignity.

In particular, the sample administrative procedure provided as an appendix to the policy outlines in detail steps that should be taken to ensure that all official records reflect a student's preferred name/pronouns, that all teachers and staff are made aware of a student's preferred names/pronouns and expected to use them, and that any intentional failure to use a student's preferred names/pronouns are "taken seriously, investigated properly, documented and dealt with in a timely manner."

Then the Children's Advocate looks at the negative impacts of the policy:

The policy clearly discriminates against transgender children who are unable or unwilling to seek parental consent for the use of their preferred name and pronouns. Children and youth are guaranteed the right to education without discrimination pursuant to both the UNCRC and *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*.

And we can thank the Minister for Advanced Education for the fact that gender identity is a prohibited ground of discrimination under that human rights code. That's not a quote. Those are my words, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'll repeat that. We can thank the Minister for Advanced Education for the fact that gender identity is a prohibited ground of discrimination under *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*.

I'm continuing with the quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Human rights commissions across the country have stated that "refusing to refer to a trans person by their chosen name and a personal pronoun that matches their gender identity or purposefully misgendering will likely be discrimination when it takes place in services like education."

Although *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* allows age-based distinctions, there is no such statute legislation when and how an individual can express their gender identity.

It is inequitable for some young people to have their human right to gender identity and expression respected while for others, it is not. The fact that a young person's teacher can use the preferred name and pronouns of the transgender student seated next to them only to turn and misgender them, as required by school policy, is a clear case of discrimination.

That was the example I was giving, or at least attempting to give earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The very same children who are denied their self-identity at home are therefore also denied their identity at school.

Let me repeat that:

The very same children who are denied their self-identity at home are therefore also denied their identity at school. In this way, the most vulnerable transgender students are further marginalized by this policy.

These are not my words. These are the words of the Advocate for Children and Youth, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The policy will therefore both create new inequities and exacerbate existing ones. As outlined earlier, the literature is clear that children who are discriminated against in this way will experience increased anxiety and depression, are likely to feel unsafe and disrespectful, and likely grow resentful of their teachers, principals, guidance counsellors, coaches, peers, and others who refuse to use their preferred name or pronouns. The policy will therefore decrease the number of trusted adult allies in the lives of precisely those transgender children and youth who need such allies the most.

Additionally, this policy applies a distinctly different standard towards gender-diverse youth, as there is no corresponding obligation for parental consent to be attained by students who use a preferred name for reasons unrelated to the expression of their gender identity.

The children's rights impact assessment report then moves on to article 3, the best interests of the child. The best interests of the child is a long-established legal principle that should guide all of us as legislators when enacting laws that impact children. It is what guides family law courts across the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it is language that tellingly is completely absent from this new bill.

I'm going to quote from the report. Article 3, page 31, best interests of the child.

Article 3(1) of the UNCRC states that “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be primary consideration.”

Now this article actually has no section on positive impacts. The Advocate for Children and Youth was not able to point to any positive impacts on the best interests of the child in this pronoun policy that we see under Bill 137. As for the negative impacts of the policy:

The policy does not mention the best interests of the child and prioritizes other considerations — specifically parental consent in the name of inclusion — in institutional actions concerning transgender children. Beyond the UNCRC, the principle of the best interest of the child is a well-established legal precedent for decision making in Canada. The ministry has not provided credible evidence as to why this established precedent should not apply to the decision to refuse to use the preferred names and pronouns of transgender students in Saskatchewan.

So in other words the advocate is concerned that this best interests of the child legal principle, which is a well-established principle — it’s a foundational principle of law in Canada — should not be the principle that guides our assessment of this pronoun policy.

The Government of Saskatchewan has adopted Saskatchewan’s Children and Youth First Principles in 2009 which not only commit to making the best interests of children a “paramount consideration,” but also to making children and youth “the primary client, and at the centre, of all child-serving systems.” An individual’s human right to respect for their gender identity and expression cannot be vetoed or taken away by another person, including their parent or guardian. Allowing parents or children under age 16 to do so by virtue of withholding consent when an age-based distinction is not justified unjustly prioritizes the interest of parents and does not put the child or their best interests at the centre.

And earlier in her report, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it’s interesting to see the advocate point to a number of policies that are currently functioning in other branches of the Government of Saskatchewan, other ministries where we don’t see this same need for parental consent. For example, the Ministry of Social Services has policies respecting the preferred name and pronouns and gender of children and youth in out-of-home care, as self-identified by the child. Respect for a child’s gender identity is not dependent on age, and MSS [Ministry of Social Services] policies specifically apply to children under 16.

So there’s an inconsistency right there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Notably, preferred names and pronouns are, “respected on MSS forms and in informal interactions with children in care under section 9, where parents retain decision-making powers in all other areas.” The advocate then moves on to the Ministry of Corrections, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

The Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety also has a policy on which our office was invited to consult,

specific to meeting the needs of transgender young offenders related to admission, classification, and placement within correctional facilities.

The decisions . . . sorry, the policy . . . I won’t even try to summarize. I’ll just read it all because I’m actually being less efficient.

The objective of this policy includes the following statement: “Appropriate classification and placement of transgender offenders will contribute to successful offender management and ensure that the rights of these individuals are respected in accordance with *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*, and for youth also in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

[20:45]

The policy further recognizes that, “a failure to take into account a transgender offender’s needs and circumstances and accommodate those needs short of undue hardship may result in a violation of *Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*.”

It states that decisions regarding the identification of a person’s gender are to be made between ministry staff and the offender and that the primary consideration of identifying a transgender individual is self-identification. The policy does indicate that for youth these decisions may also include the offender’s guardians and/or others where appropriate, but the youth shall be consulted as to whom they wish to include in the decision making. The policy does not set a limitation on the ability of a youth to self-identify their gender identity based on their age and therefore could apply to any young people aged 12 and over who may be admitted to a correctional facility.

In contrast to the Ministry of Education’s policy, there is discretion afforded to correctional staff as to when the inclusion of their parents/guardians would be appropriate.

So we basically have a situation here by virtue of this poorly drafted, hastily drafted new Bill 137 where the youth in corrections, the children and youth in the corrections system have more rights than youth and children in our schools. And I’m going to argue they should have of course the same rights, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Not fewer rights. That makes no sense. They should have the same rights.

The Advocate for Children and Youth then goes on to look at *The Vital Statistics Act* and the approach taken therein, and other policies of other Saskatchewan government ministries that align with the legally entrenched doctrine the mature minor. This is the spectrum I was talking about earlier.

We don’t flip a switch and go from child to adult. There’s a spectrum. And as we approach adulthood we get more and more autonomy. We get more and more choice. We get more and more responsibilities. And that principle is recognized in the mature minor doctrine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is entirely absent. An exception such as this is entirely absent from this poorly drafted, hastily drafted legislation.

The mature minor doctrine dictates that the ability of a young

person to make personal decisions ought to be based on their capacity to do so rather than their chronological age.

It does not follow then that the same recognition of capacity and confidentiality regarding the use of preferred name and pronouns as an expression of gender identity would not be respected within the school environment. This approach is incongruent with government legislation and policy in other areas.

Again the Advocate for Children and Youth, the officer of this Assembly, is telling you that this policy is incongruent with the other things that you're doing, the other arms of government, the other policies and other ministries.

So we actually have a situation where children in our education system are treated worse than children who are served by other ministries. This makes absolutely no sense. It's not consistent with your other policies, it's not consistent with your other legislation, and it's not consistent with well-established legal doctrines in this country like the best interests of the child, like the mature minor doctrine. And it's not consistent with the Charter and the human rights code, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The use of preferred names and pronouns by students policy [and I'm going to suggest that this is also the case with this bill] presumes that all young people under the age lack this capacity. Specifically, the Supreme Court has concluded that the blanket restriction of a young person under the age of 16 from making their own health decisions without being given the opportunity to demonstrate capacity is arbitrary and amounts to an unconstitutional deprivation of liberty and security of the person.

Section 7. That basic right under the Charter that this government has pre-emptively enacted the notwithstanding clause because they are not confident that they can limit this right in a way that is justifiable in a free and democratic society. That right, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The doctrine of the mature minor has been accepted by courts in Saskatchewan as well as the Saskatchewan medical community, the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers, and the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. Notably, school counsellors and social workers who are typically regulated by the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers are likely to be among those professional supports to which a student would be referred if they have concerns about approaching their parent/guardian for consent to use their preferred names and pronouns.

While current case law around this doctrine deals primarily with medical decisions, it is clear the Supreme Court places significant weight on respect for the decisions of mature minors of any age. Deference in this regard is to be applied on a sliding scale of scrutiny, meaning that the young person's ability to make an independent decision will be scrutinized more heavily as the severity of the potential consequences of their decision increases. Many medical decisions in which this would be applied would have more significant consequences in the life of a young person than

the use of a preferred name and/or pronoun as they are exploring their identity.

Those words could not be further from the truth, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In other words, this is not such a big deal as many of the other things that children are provided the autonomy under the law to have some say in, some autonomy, some capacity to choose. Again this is inconsistent with the way that government operates in a whole host of other arenas. This hastily drafted, poorly drafted legislation rammed through in four days without following the usual procedural norms of this Legislative Assembly, it's a mess, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The other thing I want to touch on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the inconsistencies and the muddiness and the mess that this legislation is going to create . . . Well there's a few areas that I want to touch on, but one is education and social work codes of ethics.

One of the interesting debates that's . . . Oh, I don't even know if I should go here because I might go down another rabbit hole, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But one of the things that is currently being discussed by legal scholars when it comes to the notwithstanding clause is the fact that there has to be a distinction between the fact that a law can still operate . . . So sure, you've invoked the notwithstanding clause. The law can still operate, notwithstanding the fact that there's an unjustifiable infringement of Charter rights.

But legal scholars are saying, hey wait. You're still violating people's rights. And the notwithstanding clause cannot be invoked, my understanding is, for section 24 under the Charter. Section 24 under the Charter courts have interpreted to include, for example, the right to damages or the right to a declaration that their rights have been violated.

So one of the interesting things that's kind of being kicked around in the legal scholarship right now is, okay fine, you can operate this bill not . . . Oh sorry, I keep doing that and I apologize, especially to you. Yes, this law can continue in operation, despite the fact that it violates Charter rights. But there still might be some recourse by the minority who is having their rights violated. There still might be some damages. There still might be some responsibility on the part of the government because it's not like your rights stopped being violated. And that actually has real impacts like when you look at what could happen to one of these children that has their rights impacted. There could be harm. There might even be death, as we've spoken about.

So let's be very clear that just because you've triggered the notwithstanding clause, there are a whole other host of issues that you're going to have to deal with potentially, and one of those is the fact that you've now put teachers, social workers, people that have separate, independent guiding codes of ethics and professional responsibilities in a situation where in order to comply with the employer, they are going to have to be violating kids' rights and potentially harming them.

I'm betting, given what I know about the teaching profession, given what I know about the teachers that I know working in school systems today, they are not going to opt to violate kids' rights, but they're going to be placed in a really difficult position.

Are they going to be disciplined if they don't do this? Will an arbitrator side with the government? This is just the beginning of a whole host of additional issues that this government is going to have to deal with.

The Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board standards of conduct require that registered teachers base their relationships with learners on mutual trust and respect by “honouring individual’s identity and circumstances without prejudice.” Teachers’ standards of conduct require that they honour individual identity, and I would argue that would include a child or a youth’s ability to self-identify. So right there, that educator is in a bit of a bind. The standards of conduct require that they have regard for the safety and academic, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of learners by, “taking measures to provide a model and model a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment at school.”

Well we’ve canvassed at length the fact that having a safe and inclusive environment at school includes, hopefully, adults around you that will call you what you want to be called even if your parent and guardian aren’t on board.

So again that puts teachers in a bit of a bind, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It requires that they act with honesty and integrity by “communicating openly, truthfully, and respectfully with all relevant parties while maintaining necessary confidentiality” and uphold public trust and confidence in the education profession by “maintaining appropriate communication and professional relationships with learners, parents, guardians, colleagues, and other stakeholders.”

Like, I tried to say it, but I think the advocate says it better. So I’ll just quote. This is the top of page 25 of her report:

Under these standards, registered teachers can be disciplined for misconduct for “any intentional act or omission designed to humiliate or cause distress or loss of dignity to any person in school or out of school which may include verbal or non-verbal behaviour.”

It’s interesting. I’m not sure where I read it, but I know it’s been canvassed in here that in some situations, and I think it was the advocate’s report, deadnaming students can actually constitute harassment. So we’re in a situation where teachers could be disciplined for deadnaming students. They could also be disciplined by their employer for not following this legislation.

Again, this wasn’t thought through. This wasn’t thought out. This was a political stunt and it’s not going away. And they’ve opened a can of worms and I don’t even think that they know the extent to which they’ve opened that can of worms, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Just to put a fine point on it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is noted that SPTRB’s standards in particular refer to appropriate communication with parents and guardians. However as it has already been determined that refusing to honour a mature student’s preferred name and pronouns in the absence of parental guardian consent is discriminatory, “necessitating this refusal may require teachers to violate their own professional standards of conduct in addition to human rights law.”

[21:00]

So we have before us a bill, and by virtue of the fact that the Sask Party government have seen fit to pre-emptively invoke the notwithstanding clause, because they know that the violation of Charter rights could not be justified in a free and democratic society, will now necessitate teachers to conduct themselves in a way that violates their own professional standards of conduct in addition to human rights law.

I don’t think teachers are going to do it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you’re going to pit them between this bill and the well-being and human rights of students and their professional standards of conduct, the little that I know about teachers — because I’m not one; I am in awe of what they do, but I don’t know that much about their day-to-day — but the little that I know about the fine teachers of this province, they’re not going to violate the human rights of children. They’re just not.

So what’s the plan then, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Or maybe it just won’t matter to this government because they’re saying on the one hand, this is an emergency and it’s urgent, but on the other hand, this is just a continuation of what’s happening anyway. This is just status quo.

Additionally, the standards of practice for registered social workers in Saskatchewan states that:

Under dignity of clients, that a social worker “will not impose any stereotypes on a client based on behaviour, values, or roles related to gender that would interfere with the provision of professional services to the client and shall use reasonable advocacy and other intervention activities to ensure that the dignity, individuality, and rights of their clients are safeguarded.”

Mental health counsellors employed in Saskatchewan schools are often social workers and are bound by the SASW standards of practice. Under the policy, these professionals would also be required to misgender students under age 16 if they do not have parental/guardian consent for the use of their preferred name and pronouns. This dynamic would likely interfere with the efficacy of counselling to that student.

So we’re basically pitting teachers and social workers against the human rights of kids and their own standards of professional conduct. Good job, guys. Way to go. Big W.

I want to turn to another letter that came from a constituent who wishes to remain anonymous because they work in the school system, but a lot of respect for this person. It’s an interesting letter. It’s got footnotes: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight footnotes. So this person has put a lot of thought into this. It’s dated October 8th, 2023.

An Open Letter to the Government and Citizens of Saskatchewan:

Throughout human history, parents have been concerned about malevolent forces coming to steal or harm their children. Mythical creatures, Baba Yaga from Russia, Krampus from northern Europe, Ao bōzu from Japan, or Ijiraq from the Inuit, or even the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin attest to this universal and timeless concern.

As magic and myth have waned, new threats have appeared. As a kid I had to worry about being abducted and sacrificed by Satanists, and as a teen I was told heavy metal music and Dungeons and Dragons would lead me to kill myself. In early 2018 we were all warned of the incompetence of teens themselves as the epidemic of the Tide pod challenge swept the world. Actual statistics are hard to find.

Moral panics like these have a long history of being used for political purposes. I'm a school counsellor. As with all the scenarios above, I do not see a need that apparently requires a sweeping pronoun policy to "protect" children and parents from a shadowy, hard-to-define threat.

This is especially the case when there is ample evidence and research to establish the harm this policy will cause. I'm not saying there are no risks or problems for students and parents, but this policy does not address the actual problems we see in schools on a daily basis.

I'm going to repeat that. "This policy does not address the actual problems we see in schools on a daily basis."

I have never had a student come to me and ask me not to reveal a chosen pronoun to their parent. In one of the high schools I work in of about 500 students, other staff have told me they know of "a handful" of incidents where a student wanted to use a different name but did not want their parents to know.

Students do ask me to maintain confidentiality on some topics, primarily if they are feeling suicidal, engaging in self-harm, or dealing with substance use problems. I deal with this on a weekly basis, and I never encourage secrecy. However students are afraid they will simply receive unhelpful punishments if their parents are told. They want help or they would not be talking to me. Counselling is voluntary. They usually want their parents' help too, but they are convinced they will be in a worse position if they speak to their parents.

The most common problem that I personally see and deal with are anxiety and depression, which is also the case with students who present as LGBTQ2S+. This is not just my anecdotal experience, but it is reflected by other therapists working with this population. When I see LGBTQ2S+ students, their presenting problem is not usually their sexuality or gender, but the same problems other students bring to me. For the most part, they and their peers appear comfortable in their identities.

From my perspective this policy is grossly overblowing a statistically minor problem, seriously complicating situations where this is the presenting problem. It also seems to assume that professionals with years of training and experience in dealing with certain problems need direction from people without training or experience. The current government seems to have solved that by lumping us in with the nebulous, malevolent forces out to harm children.

Exacerbating a moral panic may be politically beneficial for the current government, however it is incredibly harmful to a whole host of people. It also undermines trust in

professionals whose professional code of ethics already demand that clients not be harmed.

Sincerely, a Saskatchewan school counsellor.

I want to read another letter by Erin Chard, who identifies as she/her. She's a constituent of Regina Wascana Plains. She's a wonderful health care provider in our city, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Her letter is dated August 22nd, 2023.

Dear Hon. Dustin Duncan:

I'm extremely disheartened to learn of the Sask government's announcement today to restrict gender autonomy for the youth of Saskatchewan and limit their ability to identify a preferred name. What are you hoping to accomplish by doing this? The letter is written under the guise of increasing parental involvement, but for those of us who are well versed in providing transgendered care, it reads as limiting options and forced outing for those who are gender-diverse.

The United Nations recognizes that "self-determined gender is a cornerstone of a person's identity," and failure to allow that to happen results in a myriad of negative consequences, including discrimination, violence, and exclusion in social settings including educational environments.

Youth who have supportive parents and guardians may struggle with how and when to identify their gender identity to them. Imagine how it would feel to a young person with unsupportive parents. Having this government dictate why and when that happens is a dangerous, dystopian practice that does not represent what is in the best interests of youth.

Does the current government appreciate that suicide rates are disproportionately high in transgender youth and that youth in general often rely on adults other than parents and guardians, for example teachers, to provide a safe space for them to freely express themselves? This infringes on that ability, and I am fearful will result in negative consequences.

According to your new policy, my 14-year-old son Samuel will now require my permission to go by his preferred name of Sam. Is it the best use of our already-overworked teachers' time to verify parent preferences when it comes to the use of names? Or is it only problematic to the current government if my son would prefer to be called a name historically associated with the opposite gender?

In 2015 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights enacted legislation to protect the freedom of gender expression which your new policies directly contravene.

As the current government for the people of Saskatchewan, I urge you to represent the best interests of all your constituents and foster the inclusion of gender-diverse people. I implore you to adopt measures to protect trans and gender-diverse children rather than creating more barriers and more discrimination.

Sincerely,
Erin Chard

I want to thank Erin for submitting that letter to be read into the record.

I see that the Minister for Social Services has been listening intently to the comments that have been put into the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think that's really important, and I think that that's appreciated.

As the critic for Social Services, the critic for housing, the critic for community-based organizations, I'm concerned about what this policy will do to already-vulnerable youth. You know, we had some wonderful guests in the Speaker's gallery just last week from the John Howard Society and from Lulu's Lodge, the only transitional shelter for LGBTQ2S+ youth in Regina.

And we know that there are particular housing challenges for this demographic. I understand that nearly one out of every three homeless young person in Canada identifies as 2SLGBTQ [two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning]. And the stats . . . I understand there's a bit of a lack of data specific to Saskatchewan, although the data that we do have indicates that, you know, whatever the national trend is or whatever the national average, Saskatchewan is often worse in terms of the outcomes for trans and queer youth.

Lulu's Lodge, they had an event on August 26th, I believe it was. It was a celebrity drag show — I had an opportunity to give them a shout-out, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and it was a great event. One of the things that happened at that event was that the former MLA for Coronation Park and the former champion of Walk the Walk had an opportunity to give remarks. And you know, it was a pretty emotional night, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think it was just within days of this pronoun policy being enacted. And I think he just said, you know, the rights of the parent don't override the rights of children; the rights of children matter. And the room just exploded with applause and appreciation. And I thought that was rather courageous of him to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[21:15]

And I know, sorry I'm kind of jumping around here, but you know, all of us know what it's like to be part of a political party. You know, we're part of this Legislative Assembly, we're part of this government — in government or in opposition — but we're also part of a political party. And sometimes that means that you agree, you know, 99 per cent on everything. You agree with your colleagues 99 per cent. For some people it's not tough, you know, it's just clear. In some cases you believe in, you know, 95 per cent, 90 per cent, 80 per cent.

But you're always wondering, like, what are the compromises that I'm willing to make, and what are the compromises that I'm not willing to make? And I think that as legislators and as human beings, if we're not asking ourself that question, we're not taking a step back each and every day and saying okay, am I still choosing to do this for the right reasons? Do I still believe in what we're doing? Do I believe I'm a force for good, and where is the line in the sand for me, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

And I know that there's some members on that other side that can't be completely comfortable with this bill, whether because of the impact it's going to have on the citizens that their ministry targets or helps or seeks to help, because of their own personal

experience — maybe they worked as an educator; maybe they worked as a principal; maybe they're a member of the bar. But I hope that everyone is having that conversation with themselves, I guess.

But you know, it is incumbent upon each and every one of these members, particularly those that have a cabinet posting, to think about the impact that this legislation might have on the people that they are duty bound to represent and to protect. And I think when it comes to, you know, housing, mental health issues, poverty even, we need to remember that compared to the general population, transgender and gender-nonconforming people in Canada are also seven times more likely to have addiction issues, which is likely related to trauma; five times more likely to have mental health issues; five times more likely to attempt suicide; two times as likely to experience severe poverty and homelessness.

And I think about the good work that Lulu's Lodge does without government funding, without a cent from this government. That's why they have to host elaborate fundraisers like Walk the Walk, so they can raise that money in the community. It's not support that they're receiving from the provincial government, despite the fact that this is directly within its mandate.

And they're operating at or close to capacity all the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the need for those services is only going to go up. So again, are we doing more harm? Are we creating more problems? Or are we solving problems? Are we doing harm or are we alleviating harm? These are basic questions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and ones that the members opposite should be asking themselves.

On that note, I have a letter here, and I think it's rather brave that they stepped up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to provide this. And this is kind of why I did want to acknowledge the obvious care that the Minister of Social Services is taking in listening to the comments that are being entered into the record.

This is a letter from the Quint Development Corporation. This is a community-based organization working in the housing field in Saskatoon that does excellent work. And it's dated October 7th, 2023. And the author is Kristen Thoms, who submitted it on behalf of the Quint Development Corporation.

We are writing to you on behalf of the Quint Development Corporation, a community-based organization that works to improve the quality of life and economic opportunities for the residents of Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods.

We are deeply concerned about the Saskatchewan government's decision to use the notwithstanding clause to override the court ruling that halted the parental inclusion and consent policy. This policy imposes a top-down decision that disregards the voices and rights of transgender and nonbinary youth who are part of the community. The decision can create lasting barriers and challenges and fosters a climate of discrimination, exclusion, and violence that harms youth's mental and physical health. These negative impacts not only affect transgender and nonbinary youth but the community as a whole.

Creating a safe space in schools for 2SLGBTQ+ youth to identify how they want to is essential for their well-being and development. When 2SLGBTQ+ youth are affirmed and celebrated for who they are, they will achieve greater academic success, personal growth, social connections, and civic engagement. These positive outcomes benefit not only these youth but also the whole community. The Saskatchewan government's parental consent on pronoun policy is not only a violation of human rights but also a threat to the vibrancy and strength of the community.

We urge you to reconsider your decision to use the notwithstanding clause and to respect the court ruling that protects the rights of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. We also request you to engage in meaningful dialogue with the community, organizations, advocates, and allies to understand their perspectives and needs. This is your chance to listen to your constituents and recognize that difference and diversity is what makes us a strong community. We hope you will act in the best interests of all Saskatchewan residents and promote a more inclusive and prosperous community for everyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll submit this is not a lot to ask. This is not a lot to ask of this Sask Party government. They have asked that this government pause and consult. Pause and consult, take their time, enter into a dialogue, consult with stakeholders — things that the usual rules of this Legislative Assembly are designed to allow for. It is not a lot to ask. I want to thank Kristen Thoms and Quint Development Corporation for stepping forward and providing that letter to be read on the record.

I think I'll continue with a few additional letters, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This one is from a constituent of Saskatoon Northwest, Cordelia Koob, goes by she/her:

I am writing to express my extreme distress over the recent actions of the Sask Party regarding parental rights in our schools. I believe that the legislation they are trying to push forward is harmful and sets an incredibly dangerous precedent. I worry for the children who will be forced to stay silent or risk their welfare. I worry for the teachers who will be put in a position where they will have to choose between their jobs or the safety of their students. I worry for the rest of the marginalized communities in our province who might have their rights overridden next.

Not only is the policy itself extremely concerning, but the willingness of the Sask Party to exercise the notwithstanding clause to push through legislation which clearly violates the rights of our children is perhaps even more so. It makes me wonder, as a citizen of this province, what will they take next?

I plead with you and with anyone who will listen to please do everything in your power to stop this government from descending into this, and to stand up for the rights and safety of our children. I worry for the children who will be forced to stay silent or risk their welfare.

I talked to a student today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who told . . . They started in a new class obviously because it was September. And they told me that they went into their homeroom and the first

thing their teacher said was . . . Likely overwhelmed by this conflict between the policy and their ethical duties and the human rights of children and all that. I'm sure all of that was going on in their head. But they just said, look, if you are questioning your gender, if you want to go by another name, just don't talk to me about it; I'm not the person to talk to about it anymore.

That made me pretty sad, but I can certainly see why a teacher got to that point. So the first thing that this kid heard at the beginning of the year, all of these kids in this classroom, was, whereas this may have been a place where you could ask questions, explore who you are, have a conversation with some notion that it might be, you know, there might be trust and some confidentiality respected, suddenly you're in a position where this is not a person you can go to to talk about this at all. It's kind of sad.

And part of me wondered, like well maybe this is part of the point. And I've said it in this House. Maybe there is a portion of that caucus over there who would prefer for kids to just stay in the closet. It certainly is a concept that bears reflection. There isn't a lot of other rational explanations for the way that this has rolled out for not only what is here in this bill but the way that this has played out.

Cordelia Koob asks, "I worry for the teachers who will be put in a position where they will have to choose between their jobs or the safety of their students." It's kind of the point I was trying to make before. That's kind of the point of the Children's Advocate. You know, this policy pits teachers between their professional obligations, their respect for human rights, kids, and this legislation, following this policy, risking discipline if they don't maybe. Who knows.

Cordelia Koob asks, "I worry for the rest of the marginalized communities in our province who might have their rights overridden next." This is a serious question. If the rights of vulnerable children are not off limits in the eyes of this government, whose rights are off limits? This fight is everyone's fight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because today it's the right to security, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to non-discrimination of vulnerable kids. Tomorrow it's the right to health and safety, right to strike, right to choose, right to a fair trial, right to the presumption of innocence — I don't know — right to freedom of conscience, right to freedom of religion. I don't know. I think it's all on the table. After this, it's all on the table, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All of it is very much on the table. Convince me otherwise.

Maybe one of these members on the other side, maybe a few more will find their feet and speak to this bill. I hope that they do. I want to thank Cordelia Koob of Saskatoon Northwest for submitting this letter to be read into the record.

[21:30]

Next is a letter from Shannon Dea. She's a she/her. She's a constituent of Regina Lakeview:

Dear Members of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly,

I'm the parent of a now adult queer child and a scholar of sex and gender. I write to you to express my strongest

possible objection to the government's recently announced student pronoun and name policy and the use of the notwithstanding clause to defend that policy.

Family acceptance and support is crucial to the well-being and flourishing of two-spirit, trans, and nonbinary youth. Studies show that gender-diverse youth are less likely to commit suicide if their family is supportive. Thus there are good reasons to find ways to help parents play sensitive and supportive roles in the lives of their gender-diverse children.

At the same time, however, trans youth experience shockingly high rates of abuse from unsupportive family members, especially parents. One recent study found that 43 per cent of trans and nonbinary youth have experienced abuse from family members, with 30 per cent experiencing the abuse below the age of 11.

It is no wonder then that some trans kids are afraid to come out at home. For them, schools are often safer spaces to begin to explore their gender. The UN convention on the rights of children to which Canada is signatory asserts children's right to privacy. Children also have the right to life, liberty, and security of person under the Charter. *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

Thus, whether we apply international, national, or a provincial lens . . .

Again — and these are my words; this isn't in the letter — thanks to the Minister for Advanced Education, *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity. So Shannon is right. Whether we apply:

. . . an international, national, or provincial lens, trans youth have fundamental rights that we are both legally and morally bound to defend.

By contrast, there is no such thing as parents' rights. That said, as a mother I understand other parents' desire to be involved in the lives of their children. Saskatchewan can best and most appropriately support that desire not by outing two-spirit, trans, and nonbinary youth against their will and thereby exposing them to fear, stigma, in some cases abuse, but by ensuring that Saskatchewan residents, including parents, have access to accurate information about gender identity and sexual health so that they are well prepared to lovingly support their children of all genders.

The well-being of gender-diverse children is too precious and important to be sacrificed for political points. Please do not use the notwithstanding clause to abrogate the rights of some of Saskatchewan's most vulnerable residents.

It's a letter from Shannon Dea. I want to thank her for submitting that.

I'm just trying to decide whether to go back to the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a real song in my heart for the notwithstanding clause tonight. And I stayed up too late reading the many articles by professor Robert Leckey on the notwithstanding clause.

No, I think I'm going to read another letter and then maybe come back to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to read a letter by Dr. Jason Demers, who is an associate professor at the U of R and a constituent of Regina Lakeview.

Dear Members of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly,

On October 10th, the Legislative Assembly is being recalled to invoke the notwithstanding clause to push forward legislation regarding pronoun use in public schools. The clause is being invoked to override an injunction by Court of King's Bench Justice Michael Megaw that would allow the court to determine whether the policy violates children rights to security and privacy. The injunction was granted because Justice Megaw was concerned the policy could do "irreparable harm" if implemented.

In the current political climate, one worries that issues are being used to sow ideological division and that policy creation and debate hinge upon political strategy rather than due consideration and debate. As legislators, you wield a great deal of power and responsibilities.

Academics benefit from the principle of academic freedom, but that freedom also comes with great responsibility. Academic opinion must be based on comprehensive reading and evidence-based research.

One hopes that, as democratically elected officials, MLAs will be free to vote on the use of the notwithstanding clause after due consideration of testimony from people with expertise in family and human rights law, including the commissioner of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission . . .

Incidentally, since Dr. Jason Demers wrote this letter, one of the Saskatchewan human rights commissioners has stepped down in protest. Continuing:

. . . Saskatchewan's Advocate for Children and Youth, and from representatives from the 2SLGBTQ+ community. A study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal in 2022 found that transgender youth are five times more likely to think about or attempt suicide than their peers. While we like to think of home "as a safe space for children," this is a dangerous generalization for legislators to make.

I am on the board of directors for the John Howard Society of Saskatchewan. I have learned a great deal during my short time with the organization. JHSS operates a number of homes for at-risk youth in the province, including Lulu's Lodge in Regina. Lulu's Lodge provides a safe space for 2SLGBTQ+ youth facing homelessness. The main reason why queer youth face homelessness in the city is due to family rejection.

The lodge is always close to capacity and sometimes has a wait-list. Experts warn that the hastily drafted legislation will put youth in this province at risk of houselessness, self-harm, and suicide. With the safety and well-being of children held in the balance, this is a time for very careful deliberation, not partisan politics. I ask that you take your

responsibility as legislators very seriously, lest irreparable harm be done to some of the most vulnerable youth in this province. Dr. Jason Demers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also just want to note that when this challenge to the pronoun policy was initiated, that the Premier tried to claim that it was, oh, eastern interests meddling in our province. But it is John Howard Society that is seeking leave to intervene in that action as we speak. The very well-respected community-based organization that does incredible work in this province, that runs the only transitional shelter for queer and nonbinary youth. They have stepped forward, which is an act of courage in my opinion, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They receive funding from this provincial government. Not for Lulu's Lodge, mind you. But they receive funding from this provincial government, and yet they have been so compelled by their mandate to serve and protect vulnerable youth that they have stepped forward to participate in this legal action against the provincial government. It's not just eastern interests meddling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's organizations that are deeply involved in providing hope and care to the very most vulnerable residents of this province.

Another interesting thing that our fabulous, brilliant staff were able to pull up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just on that note. It's sort of an aside, but there was a reference in some media that was pulled up from the '90s when the Saskatchewan NDP amended *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* to include prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. And I'm trying to find these articles . . . Here they are, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I really need to read some of the parallels, I guess if they're parallels. But the conservatives of the time opposed this move to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

But that's not why I'm bringing it to this legislature's attention. I guess it's a good reminder that our Charter, our human rights legislation, these are living, breathing documents that have to expand and adjust as we progress as a community, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'm sure it was very much in that spirit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Minister for Advanced Education saw fit to expand the prohibited grounds of discrimination to gender identity, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But at the time — it's very interesting to read these articles — there was something of a moral pushback, a moral panic so to speak, as there was a debate going on in the public about whether or not it should be expanded to include sexual orientation. I don't think . . . I'm trying to do the math. I don't think anyone here was around for this debate, but I stand to be corrected, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But there was some pushback from conservative forces that, by including sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination, you know, we were pushing the gay agenda. We were going to make people gay. We were going to make them . . . yeah, so gay. We were going to somehow undermine the social order. I'm looking to this article from 1993 — sorry, I'm looking for this now. I wish that I could do this with more grace — that they were sort of trying to convince people to be gay.

And it's so interesting because then Justice minister Bob Mitchell

actually, in some of his quotes, had to defend himself against that accusation. Like no, we're not trying to make people gay. We're just acknowledging that some people are gay and that they should be protected under our human rights legislation.

But what's so interesting about this is that there is a quote here from Egale, Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere. Evanna Simpson, a spokeswoman, is quoted saying that . . . This is a quote. We've changed some of the terminology since. "Saskatchewan's homosexual community welcomes the proposed changes but thinks they are long overdue." I'm going to just suggest that this eastern organization that's meddling in our affairs has a long and proud tradition of engaging in debates, important debates around human rights in this province. This is an article from the *Leader-Post*, February 20th, 1993.

Turning back to the letters, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank Dr. Jason Demers, not only for his letter, but his service on the board of directors of the John Howard Society of Saskatchewan.

[21:45]

I want to next read a letter from Dr. Vanessa Mathews, who's also an associate professor whose research interests include craft beer, building reuse, heritage, urban space, urban planning, gentrification, and embodied practice.

Dear members of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly:

Premier Scott Moe announced that he is recalling parliament with the aim of protecting parental rights and is invoking the notwithstanding clause to force adoption of his government's school policy on student name and pronoun use. This is a policy that has raised considerable concerns from those involved in advocacy roles and human rights for children and youth in this province, including the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth.

I urge you to vote against the use of the notwithstanding clause as per the decision issued by Justice Michael Megaw. The school policy should not be implemented until it can be assessed to ensure that it does not violate constitutional rights and determine its legitimacy.

To invoke the notwithstanding clause will undermine public trust in the democratic and independent role of the judiciary to protect and recognize all members of society. It is a misuse of power to override and supersede Charter rights for political gain. Placing politics above the law is dangerous ground. It sacrifices the most vulnerable members of our society to appease a fringe minority.

I want to thank Dr. Vanessa Mathews for submitting that letter. And you know, when a call was put out to receive these letters, I understand that we've received hundreds and hundreds of them. And I guess one of the clear themes in terms of the feedback we're getting from the public is not so much feedback about necessarily always the preferred pronoun policy or kind of the substantive aspects of the bill, but it's really the sense of outrage and concern over the use of the notwithstanding clause.

And there's been a lot of talk about polling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Everyone's using it as a shield and a sword and batting it back, you know, to defend their position. But what I did find interesting is I . . . And I don't know if anyone's talked about this yet, because I was too busy trying to organize my thoughts to listen as closely as I should have, knowing that my colleagues were doing an excellent job of representing the feedback of their constituents. But it was a lot to kind of coordinate all of this information and make sure that we were amassing all the letters provided by our constituents and providing them here today. So I don't know whether someone has touched on this poll yet. But it was a poll done by . . . And actually, before we get to the poll I want to go back to Robert Leckey.

I think where we left off with Robert Leckey was how he urged us to assess any invocation of the notwithstanding clause with two things in mind. One is the timing and the other was the scope of the rights that are . . . the scope of protection activated by the notwithstanding clause. And he urged us to think about the difference between what is legal and what is right. That's where we left off, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to share a more recent article from Dr. Robert Leckey where he talks about, again, the increasing use of the notwithstanding clause and the fact that, you know, there's increasingly the eyes of the nation on this practice. You know, he notes that again . . . He touches on when Doug Ford used it to ban strikes of education workers. There was a repeal of that law, sort of in a dramatic backtrack. And Robert Leckey looks to these cases, he looks to these incidents where the notwithstanding clause has been invoked, and he says the following:

In my view, Canada is overdue for a robust public debate about the circumstances in which using the notwithstanding clause is legitimate. I choose my words deliberately. By a legitimate use of this mechanism in our Charter, I mean one that conforms with political morality and is justifiable by sound reasons.

Legitimacy is different than legality. Legality concerns the conditions that a legislature must satisfy for its recourse to the notwithstanding clause to be valid, granting the law in question immunity from the possibility of being struck down for violating rights.

The Supreme Court of Canada spoke to those conditions in *Ford v. Quebec* some 35 years ago. It took a formal approach, ruling that it is sufficient if the legislature lists the section of the Charter for which it is derogating without any reason or indication of why it does so.

It's interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is true that the *Ford v. Quebec* case from the Supreme Court of Canada is the main case dealing with the notwithstanding clause, and it is quite dated — 35 years old. And I think this is part of the reason that legal scholars are sort of giving the opinion that the notwithstanding clause is due for some pretty heavy interpretation from the courts, not only because there hasn't been a case in 35 years or over 35 years, but because we see its use being invoked more casually and more commonly.

"The court accepted . . ." So he's talking about here *Ford v. Quebec*, this case 35 years ago, the main case on the interpretation of when and how to invoke . . . Well really just how

to invoke the notwithstanding clause.

The court also accepted that a legislature could use the notwithstanding clause pre-emptively, upstream of any constitutional challenge. When the court announced that approach, it was early in the life of our Charter. Over time the court has revised its approach to other matters in constitutional case law. There is no reason to view the court's approach from 1988 as immune to similar evolution, but that's a matter for another day.

Failing to distinguish legitimacy from legality in connection with the notwithstanding clause leads to sterile debates. When people criticize a government for using the notwithstanding clause, changing the rules for elections as in Ontario, or effectively excluding Muslim women and others who wear religious symbols from holding certain jobs in the public sector as in Quebec, they often mean that the use is illegitimate.

Elected lawmakers and their defenders often reply that the Charter includes the notwithstanding clause so its use is legal. A reminder that the government was duly elected may follow. In such exchanges, individuals and groups speed past one another without meaningful engagement because they focus on different ideas.

Robert Leckey goes on to write:

Crucially having authority to do something doesn't tell us whether that authority has been used wisely or legitimately. We know this in other contexts. In our parliamentary system the Premier may advise the Lieutenant Governor to dissolve the legislature and launch a general election. Some exercises of that prerogative appear questionable or unsound. Voters sometimes punish a government for sending them back to the polls too soon after the last election. They may view a bid to capitalize on favourable polls as opportunistic and wasteful without doubting that it was legal.

He goes on to write that:

The Charter's notwithstanding clause was a compromise between the Pierre Trudeau government of the time and most provinces to get all of them except Quebec to agree to patriation of the Constitution in 1982. The provinces specifically demanded it so legislatures, not courts, would have the final say on the operation of laws affecting certain fundamental rights. Forty years later we still lack a set of conceptual tools for judging a decision by our elected lawmakers for a law to operate despite its disrespecting our fundamental rights and freedoms.

And then he refers back to other situations where he has identified some factors that might be relevant to the tax. And you'll recall that I believe that I summarized some of those factors before. "What are the reasons for . . ." This is from another article that I've already quoted:

What are the reasons for the use of the notwithstanding clause? Do they support a vision of the public good? Do they reflect partisan or self-interest, electoral self-interest? How severe is the impact on the minorities whose protection from

majoritarian oppression is the reason we entrenched our . . . [etc., etc. I've already gone through these questions. In addition Leckey writes:]

I suggested it was worth looking to the reasons why provinces use the notwithstanding clause, including whether they support a vision of the public good or reflect partisan self-interest. In addition, how severe is the impact on the minorities whose protection from majoritarianism oppression is the reason we entrenched the Charter? Is the government making rights trade-offs differently from the courts or showing contempt for rights? You might also examine how broad a range of voices was heard during the legislative process.

Here I press the reflection further. [And this is why I came to this article, because it's a continuation of some of the ideas that I was trying to explore before. He writes:] The Supreme Court of Canada has listed questions or factors for assessing whether a limit on Charter right is reasonable and justifiable under section 1. Might we fruitfully borrow them in the context of the notwithstanding clause? The framework under section 1 asks that a law have a pressing and substantial objective. It requires that the legislative means chosen be rationally connected to pursuit of that objective and that they impair rights minimally.

Last, it seeks proportionality between the infringement of rights and the objective pursued. When a legislature enacts a law that it thinks may limit rights in a way that courts would view as unreasonable and unjustifiable, wouldn't it be good to know its thinking on these points?

Let me clarify. I'm not arguing that whether use of the notwithstanding clause is legally effective should depend on how a court assesses the government's responses to those factors. Instead I am suggesting that the questions developed by the courts for assessing which limits on rights are reasonable might help other actors in assessing, as a political matter, whether reaching for the notwithstanding clause is legitimate.

I'm going to suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a court here in Saskatchewan would likely make the determination that they should look at this piece of legislation for precisely that reason, that it will be important to the electorate when they return to the ballot box to assess whether this was not a lawful use of the notwithstanding clause, not an available use of the notwithstanding clause, but a legitimate use of the notwithstanding clause.

And I think when you look at some of these factors that Robert Leckey is urging us to use to assess the legitimacy of a government's decision to invoke the notwithstanding clause, this government comes up short. This government comes up very short. A pressing and substantial objective, well they fail right off the bat. They can't even point to a situation where this is an issue. Not one person will come forward and say, this happened and I'm upset, and this is why it was so important that we recall the legislature to address it.

[22:00]

Robert Leckey continues on in this article to identify the importance of the electorate in this circumstance:

As I have argued with Eric Mendelsohn, the electorate has a crucial oversight role to play in judging each use of the notwithstanding clause. We see that in the fact that each use of the device lasts at most five years [five years], the maximum time between general elections. Especially as our lawmakers reach for the notwithstanding clause with increasing frequency, we need to talk about how the public can meaningfully exercise that oversight, developing better tools for it to do so.

So Robert Leckey is making . . . I don't know if it's an observation or maybe just an argument that . . . Well he's making an observation I think that certainly the role of the electorate in a constitutional democracy is key. We see that built into the wording of the notwithstanding clause, section 33, where suspending the operation of a law that operates Charter rights can only be done for a maximum of five years. So right there they are contemplating the electoral process. They are contemplating the electoral process.

And what happens when a government such as the Sask Party government pre-emptively invokes the notwithstanding clause is they almost potentially deny the voting public an opportunity to actually understand the full implications of this law from a human rights perspective, potentially, only if the court decides that the issue is moot and doesn't proceed with the analysis.

Now my view is that if this is not a situation where the court will be persuaded that they should continue with a full examination of this bill and hold a full hearing where they can canvass the entirety of the evidence to assess all of the different ways that this bill will violate the rights of vulnerable kids potentially, I can't imagine a situation where a court would do that if not here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I guess the good news is, hopefully in all of this, that the electorate will have an opportunity, notwithstanding the attempt of this government to pre-emptively invoke the clause so that the eyes of the judiciary, these scrutinizing eyes that we rely on to bring balance to our democracy so that we have a check on the will of the majority by way of the courts, where this will have an opportunity to do that, Mr. Speaker, to know.

The other thing about the notwithstanding clause . . . You know, I'm going to go back to the poll for a second here, because there have been polls specifically about the content of this legislation. I'll go to it for a second here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For example, there's the Insightrix poll. And I tried to find the actual questions that were asked because there's a lot of summary of the results of that poll. Research . . . Here's some of the summary: "the use of chosen names is associated with . . ." Sorry, I'm not in the right place. Just give me a moment Mr. Deputy Speaker. Sorry.

This poll shows that 59 per cent of Saskatchewanians believe children are likely to be harmed if the government moves ahead with the school pronoun policy. It shows that the data . . . You know, this is the spark*insights poll. The data shows a drop in support for such policies from what we saw in a previous poll that was published, one that I believe the government was tweeting about and using to justify this bill.

Today's data shows that in Saskatchewan, where Premier Moe has said he will use the notwithstanding clause to pass legislation, according to this poll only 45 per cent as of October supported his position of requiring parents to be informed, with 55 per cent supporting teacher discretion. There's some duelling polling going on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I tried to get the actual questions that were put to people, because I think that would be important.

But I'm more interested in this Angus Reid poll. This is a poll done about the public support for the notwithstanding clause. And this is new data, like new as of January 2023, but what's so interesting about this poll, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that sentiments on the notwithstanding clause are largely unchanged in the 30 years since Angus Reid last asked this question. "In February . . ." and I think the members opposite should pay attention to this: "In February of 1992, 59 per cent wanted to abolish the notwithstanding clause and 41 per cent wanted to keep it. Now 55 per cent want to abolish it and 45 per cent want to keep it."

It's probably why Chrétien didn't use the notwithstanding clause. Harper didn't use the notwithstanding clause. Justin Trudeau hasn't used the notwithstanding. I think there's an acknowledgement that generally the people of Canada don't support the use of the notwithstanding clause. Whatever the substantive issue or the rights or the bills that you're dealing with, you're fundamentally uneasy with this government or any government allowing a law that would unjustifiably violate people's Charter rights to operate.

According to this Angus Reid poll, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as of January 2023:

Three in five or 58 per cent say they have been "concerned," 32 per cent, or "very concerned," 26 per cent, with the recent popularity of the clause with provincial governments. Nearly as many, 55 per cent, would like to see it abolished. In addition, majorities of Canadians believe the two uses of the clause by Ontario and Quebec in 2022 were unacceptable.

Now I've tried to canvass those uses of the notwithstanding clause and sometimes I failed to do it with grace and maybe clarity of thought, but I've tried to at least discuss those two and contextualize those two uses of the notwithstanding clause. And so we see here the majority of Canadians believe that the two uses of the clause were unacceptable.

Quebec's Bill 96, which promotes the use of French by restricting the use of English in many settings of the province, is believed to be an unacceptable use of the notwithstanding clause by approaching three-quarters, 72 per cent, of Canadians. A plurality in Quebec [perhaps unsurprising], 44 per cent disagrees. Since the clause's inception with the Constitution in 1982, Quebec has invoked it more than any other province, including in 2019 with Bill 21, a ban on religious symbols for public employees.

So we've canvassed this and we know now, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a little bit of a different political context in Quebec, but of course that Bill 21 has a lot of parallels to this Bill 137 in terms of the circumstances and timing of invoking the

notwithstanding clause. I'll continue:

In the fall of 2022 Ontario passed and then quickly repealed Bill 28, [this was Ford's about-face on the bill restricting the right of education supporters to strike] which imposed a contract on education support workers and circumvented their right for four years with the clause. More than three in five Canadians, 63 per cent, including 64 per cent of Ontarians, believe Premier Doug Ford's government use of the clause was unacceptable. Ontario has invoked the clause two times and considered using it a third, all under Ford, though only one bill has been passed and not repealed.

For Canadians the worry is that the notwithstanding clause, officially section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, weakens the rights and freedoms of their fellow citizens. Half, 48 per cent, say this, outnumbering those who instead believe the clause strengthens them, 10 per cent, or has no effect, 19 per cent. As well, there is significant belief the increased use of the clause is damaging national unity. Half, 53 per cent, of Canadians say this, nearly double those, 28 per cent, who disagree.

This is an interesting poll, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think it's probably the poll that this Sask Party government should be paying the most attention to. And that is something that perhaps . . . I mean it's not surprising to us on this side that most Canadians are fundamentally uncomfortable with what this government is doing in terms of invoking the notwithstanding clause to ram through a piece of legislation that violates the rights of vulnerable children. Because they recognize that once you violate the rights of another minority or vulnerable demographic, it's all on the table. It's a norm. Once that becomes a norm, a line that has been crossed, it's a line that the government is more likely and more willing to cross in the future, Mr. Deputy Speaker. People aren't stupid. People are busy. People are a little bit cynical about politics. People are a little bit apathetic sometimes, maybe. I think mainly they just sometimes don't see a place for them to participate in the democratic process.

But people aren't stupid. And when it comes to something as fundamental as this, they pay attention. They pay attention. So going well beyond how people feel about the pronoun policy, they're thinking, well isn't this rather extreme? Aren't they going a bit far, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The Angus Reid poll went in great detail exploring how individuals felt about actual examples where the notwithstanding clause was used. "2022 was a year of flashbacks to the 1980s for Canada," reads this poll report.

Inflation reached peaks not seen since 1983 and the Constitution passed initially in 1982 was again a hot button political topic. While it has been used before, the last time two separate provincial legislatures passed bills invoking the notwithstanding clause, section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was in 1986.

Again, you know, 35 years that it gathered dust.

One was almost immediately repealed. Ontario's Bill 28 which used the clause to prevent education workers from striking in response to an imposed contract while another,

Quebec's Bill 96, which restricts the use of English as many public and official settings is being challenged in court.

The notwithstanding clause was included in the Charter as an "escape hatch," a concession for the federal government to the provinces who felt a Charter without one would make best, would vest too much power in the courts.

Since 2018, the notwithstanding clause has been considered or invoked seven times. This represents an awakening of the clause from a period of dormancy.

[22:15]

An awakening of the clause from a period of dormancy.

There were only four invocations between 1990 and 2017. From 1982 to 1989 the clause was invoked 15 times, including immediately on the Constitution's passing by Quebec in a blanket attempt to exempt all statutes passed in the province from Charter review.

On balance Canadians are more concerned than not with the notwithstanding clause's increased use according to this poll.

Three in five, 58 per cent, say they fret over the recent popularity of the clause, which has been considered or invoked by four provinces since 2018 after not being seen since 2005. In all provinces except Quebec, the province that has used the clause the most in its history, approaching three in five, say they worry of the increased frequency of use of section 33 of the Charter. In Quebec as many say they are concerned as not with the clause's return to prominence. Comparatively in Ontario, two-thirds are worried about the increased use.

Continuing on at page 6 of 10 of this poll. "Critics of the recent . . ." or I guess the report on the conclusion of this poll, or the outcome of this poll:

Critics of the recent uses of the notwithstanding clause have argued that it is threatening the national unity of Canada. The Charter of Rights may be irrelevant "if provincial governments routinely bypass it on the way to crafting legislation that impacts fundamental freedoms," wrote Chantal Hébert in response to Ford's pre-emptive use of the clause with Bill 28.

Half of Canadians believe . . . 53 per cent believe provinces that use the notwithstanding clause are undermining national unity, while one-quarter disagree. The latter includes two in five in Quebec, the only province where more people disagree than agree with the statement.

Continuing on under the heading: half believe cause weakens constitutional rights and freedoms of Canadians.

Many feel the right to religious freedom is under threat in Quebec because of the passing of Bill 21. A Quebec teacher was told she could no longer teach in a classroom because she wore a hijab. In a ruling of Bill 21, a Quebec superior court judge wrote the law violates the religious freedom of Muslim women. Trudeau, in his interview with *La Presse*

worried increased use of the clause in general had reduced the political costs of the suspension of fundamental rights. Half, 40 per cent of Canadians believe the notwithstanding clause weakens the rights and freedoms enshrined in the country's Constitution, more than the number who believe the clause has no effect or instead strengthens them, which is only 10 per cent.

The belief the notwithstanding clause weakens constitutional rights and freedoms is highest in Ontario and lowest in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec. In those latter two provinces, there is a stronger belief that section 33 has no effect than in other jurisdictions.

And this is the last section I'll read from this, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A majority of Canadians, 55 per cent, want to see Canada scrap the notwithstanding clause, while 45 per cent would keep it. In order to abolish the clause, Canada would need to amend the Constitution which is unlikely to happen, given any constitutional amendment requires approval from the House of Commons, the Senate, and at least two-thirds of the provinces.

The end. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to recap, you know, when we look at the timing of the use of this clause, the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause, when we look at the fact that this is a situation, not where we're claiming to try to protect a minority within a majority such as language rights, but rather using it to suspend and violate the rights of a vulnerable minority; given that this government can't point to a single example that would necessitate this legislation, let alone make it urgent, Mr. Deputy Speaker; given that on the Sask Party government's own admission, they basically failed to consult anyone but parents.

And the evidence before the public is that they got 15 letters, 7 of which were from parents. Since that time they're now claiming, sometimes it's hundreds, sometimes it's thousands, sometimes it's tens of thousands. It's like the Minister of Education is going to be Dr. Evil for Halloween. Millions of parents, millions. And some of us get that reference. The Pages will not. The Pages will not.

All of these factors point to an illegitimate invocation of the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Every single one of the factors that are identified by, for example, the main legal scholar on this issue . . . Like, I'm biased because I took his classes back in the day, but he is recognized as the main legal scholar on the notwithstanding clause in Canada, not to mention a constitutional and family law expert.

All of the factors that he has pointed to and said, hey, public, when you're trying to scrutinize your government, when you're trying to assess their motivations for using the notwithstanding clause, here are some things that you might want to think about. I'll submit that all of those factors are extremely damning for the Sask Party government. Extremely damning.

And there is so much that we could be addressing in our education system right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And before I move on to some of those things, there are lawyers, practising lawyers in this province that are, to the extent that they can,

raising some concerns around this legislation as it relates to family law, the principles of family law. And there was an article in the *Leader-Post* by Brandon Harder entitled “Parents’ rights bill raises questions, concerns about family law implications.” And I’ll just borrow from this article for a moment:

The Saskatchewan government’s recently introduced parents’ bill of rights is causing some in the legal community to question how it might affect family law matters. With the proposed law being released less than a week ago, lawyers not involved in its drafting have only just begun to study it. That said, some like Beau Atkins are already feeling uneasy. “I’m concerned this new legislation will set family law in Saskatchewan back years and serve only to escalate the conflicts between squabbling parents,” wrote Atkins, a family lawyer with Evolve Law Saskatoon who clarified his comments were focused squarely on legal implications and were not intended to touch on the political, philosophical, or ideological.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as someone who practised family law here in Regina for a couple of years, schools very quickly become the site of conflict for parents that are not on good terms, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That very quickly happens in the family law context. And it’s ugly when it happens. But hey, that’s life.

I read this article and then I went back to the bill and I noticed there’s no definition of “parents.” The bill also refers to “parent/guardian.” It doesn’t refer to “parents.” It offers no guidance for a situation where parents don’t agree. And I’m going to suggest that parents often don’t agree. Parents often don’t agree when they’re living under one roof. What about when they’re separated? What about when they’re separated, Mr. Deputy Speaker? What about when there’s a kohkom or mosôm involved, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

I’m going to suggest that this legislation does not provide guidance at all when two parents who may be separated, who may have 50/50, who have shared and joint decision making for their kids, because that is often the situation . . . That is in fact the situation, barring a reason to deviate from that status quo. What happens when they disagree? What happens when mom doesn’t give consent for her daughter or son or child to go by the pronoun of their choice, with the name of their choice, and dad has the opposite view?

They go to family court. Exactly. I heard it from the Minister for Advanced Education. They go to family court, our already bursting-at-the-seams family court, where self-reps are the norm because people can’t afford a lawyer. People aren’t eligible for legal aid unless they’re on social assistance. That is a travesty in this province. Can’t afford a lawyer.

Great. There’s going to be more applications to family court, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Great use of public resources, fighting over whether . . . And you know, the Education minister kind of put it aptly, and this is not at all to discount this issue, but what kids are called, what pronoun or name they’re called on the playground. And that is not at all to take away from the gravity of this or the importance of this for people. But do we really need disputes over this to be filling up our already overburdened, already overtaxed courts, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Again they have opened a can of worms with respect to this legislation.

Oh darn, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I actually found my favourite Robert Leckey article, one that I couldn’t find earlier, and this is actually a really good article that summarizes everything. Well it might be a little bit of a summary, so I think what I’ll do is I’ll keep moving. And if I have time to come back to this I certainly will, because I certainly wouldn’t want to deprive the members of this Legislative Assembly of another opportunity to hear about the notwithstanding clause.

Before I moved on to the real crisis in our classrooms I did want to touch on just one example of how this legislation, by virtue of being drafted in a hurry, poorly, without due consideration for the many scenarios that could come up in day-to-day life is, it’s just . . . it’s very unfortunate. And that’s not the only issue that was raised in this article. Yeah, I think I’ve said enough on this topic. I’ll move on.

The real crisis in our classrooms, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were . . . Previously we led the country in terms of per-student funding in this province. It was a fact that we can be proud of. It meant that kids were more likely to get a good start in life, notwithstanding their home environment, notwithstanding the conditions that they were born into. They had a better chance of getting the supports and resources they needed in their schools.

[22:30]

And we have now dropped. You know, I’ve seen sixth. I’ve seen ninth. We’ve dropped, veering to the back of the pack when it comes to per-student funding. And we’ve seen a reduction of 17 per cent in terms of per-student funding under this government’s watch. Seventeen per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it is astounding to watch members opposite stand up and talk about, that they’re proud that we have more students in school — which, great, that is a great thing — but knowing full well that that comes with fewer supports for those students than ever before. Fewer supports than ever before.

Student enrolment was up by 3,740. That’s the number I have . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . 3,840, from the lips of the critic for Education to my ears. This is the largest increase in enrolment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 20 years in this province. This is the largest increase in enrolment this year in 20 years in terms of year-over-year increase.

The intensive needs, the needs for intensive supports have increased 38 per cent since 2017 when that Sask Party government took government. And we have more English as an additional language students than ever before. And that is a wonderful thing. It is so important that Saskatchewan be a welcoming place for newcomers. They enrich this province beyond measure. There is no question. And we owe it to these newcomers who have chosen Saskatchewan — and they’ve done the great honour of choosing Saskatchewan to start a life, to continue their lives, to bring their loved ones here, to bring their professions here — to make sure that their kids are getting the supports they need and are getting good starts in life. And it is the main indicator of whether those newcomers will opt to stay here instead of going elsewhere, and that’s been kind of a challenge recently. Bit of a trampoline province these days.

When the Education minister talks about ample supports in the classroom: one psychologist per every 2,822 students; one

speech language pathologist for every 1,345 students; one social worker for every nearly 3,000 students, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These are not ample supports in the classroom.

Teachers are being asked to do more and more with less and less. And you know, I was reading some of their testimonials because, you know, I saw some of the statistics on how many teachers have thought about leaving the profession and how many teachers think about leaving the profession within their first three or five years of service, and it's heartbreaking, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Quote:

I am close to contemplating going on leave, as I am now not sleeping properly and have high anxiety.

Quote:

As teachers, we're incredibly invested in students. My husband is always telling me you can't bring them home, literally or figuratively. It's the chicken-and-egg conversations. It's not okay that we are unable to meet the needs of our students and they can't bloom. It's about a lot more than marks for these kids, and they aren't just a number on a budget sheet. We need to have the support to meet our kiddos' needs, and that's what fuels my fire.

Quote:

I know what needs to be done and how to do it, but I cannot do it due to the lack of resources. I fill out paperwork that has in the past given students support. Now I fill out paperwork and wonder why. I am trying to still have hope by saying it will help when there is more money.

Quote:

Many students are going to fall through the cracks. We care about our students so much, but there aren't enough resources for us to support them in the way they need and deserve to be.

Education funding has not kept up with the needs of students in Saskatchewan under the Sask Party government's watch. It simply hasn't. They have presided over a decade of budgets that will result in cuts to the classroom. And I know they want to pass the buck over to school divisions and say that, oh, they're responsible for allotting those budgets, but they know full well that they are not funding these school divisions properly and that they are putting those divisions in impossible situations. And there is only so much moving around of the cups that they can do to ease the hurt and harm caused by these cutbacks.

As I said earlier, the diverse needs of students are only growing. We know this. We know this. It's not just English as an additional language. It's not just that. Intensive supports are more needed now than ever before, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Teachers are, on the one hand, dealing with these increased enrolments, and staff has been reduced while enrolment is up, so they're dealing with bigger classrooms that again are more complex, more intensive needs. More situations where students need, what students need and require of them is a little more one-on-one help, is a little

more of a tailored approach. But they can't do that in classrooms that are so large and so complex.

Teachers are doing whatever they can to fill those gaps. I have no doubt. I see it first-hand. My partner's a teacher. My sister-in-law, my friends that are teachers, my neighbours that are teachers, I see how hard they work. I see how much they care. I do. But this is leading to burnout. This is leading to worse outcomes for students. You just need to look at our reading levels, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the drops there. You just need to look at the data. We know this is happening. And this is happening under the Sask Party government's watch.

Between 2013-14 year and 2021-22 year, the total number of students increased from 170,582 to 186,084, representing an increase of 9 per cent. With the total number of full-time equivalent educators increased by only 1.1 per cent. 1.1 per cent; 9.1 per cent. That was between 2013-14 year and 2021-22. So this means that only one full-time equivalent teacher was added for every 119 students. One full-time equivalent for every 119 students added. It's basic math, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it's a pattern from this Sask Party government.

I believe I said that the intensive support needs have gone up 38 per cent. And this is where I'm getting that number: 6,742 students in 2007-08 required intensive supports, which increased to 9,309 in 2018-19, a growth of 38 per cent. While the numbers of specialists, and psychologists, speech language pathologists, social workers, that has decreased since 2013-2014. So the total number of these specialists has decreased while enrolment is way up and intensive needs are way up.

And you know, when you think about the fact that just this week — I don't know if it's just a coincidence or, you know, whatever — the fact that the Sask Party government, the talks with teachers broke down this week. Another stunning failure from this government, the fact that teachers had to walk away from the bargaining table.

Because I looked through their asks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I've looked through their asks, their proposal. They've proposed an annual pay increase of 2 per cent plus the consumer price index average annual rate for Saskatchewan for each of the next four years. Why? The cost of living has increased drastically. Teachers' salaries aren't keeping up. Their workload has become more demanding, more complex. Compensation is significant when it comes to recruiting and retaining teachers, something we know we have to do better at in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they provide a critical service to our communities, and their money goes back into the economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It doesn't seem like a tall ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So there's nothing in this Bill 137 that speaks to the real crisis in education, which is class size, class complexity, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — Violence in the classroom.

Ms. Conway: — Absolutely. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a clear attempt to pass a piece of legislation on something as important as education, but not actually address any single one of the topics that matter in that institution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that matter to people right now. Even the polls that they're referencing, this is

not a top issue for people, this pronoun policy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And again the other reason I say that it's relevant, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is because this bill on education is just a bald-faced attempt of this Sask Party government to distract from its failures, one of the most pressing of which is the crisis in our classrooms and their failure to negotiate a fair contract with teachers. Just this week, on the heels of the introduction of this bill, teachers have walked away from the bargaining table. And I think it matters to people.

What else is happening this week, while we're urgently . . . all eyes are on this bill. Bargaining talks have broken down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why aren't we talking about that in here? We had a taste of what will happen during COVID, if the place where our youth and children go during the day is no longer available to us, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a working parent, I know that when that happens, my life is thrown into chaos, as is the lives of many working parents across this province. We also know that it is imminently important for children, especially — and youth — coming out of the pandemic, to be in that educational setting. So I hope that this government is doing everything that it possibly can in good faith to reach a fair contract with teachers, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And again I say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this bill is a bald-faced attempt to distract from the other things that are happening in this province right now. And that's just one of the things that made headlines this week, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One of the other things that made headlines this week is the resignation of one of the Saskatchewan human rights commissioners in direct response to this bill. She wrote a letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[22:45]

She wrote a letter as follows:

Dear Premier Moe:

Please accept my letter of resignation as a commissioner with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, effective immediately. This decision did not come lightly. When I was appointed in 2014, I was enthusiastic about championing the ways in which Canadians can be great citizens. And because I believed that the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission was an organization that upheld individual rights, demanded people uphold the rights of others, and enabled equality and equity, I was honoured to be a commissioner. I wholeheartedly contributed my time, my knowledge, and my understanding of what it means to be a Canadian citizen for the last nine years in this role, but I can no longer continue.

I strongly disagree with the proposed legislation that requires teachers to seek parental permission to change a child's name and/or pronouns when they are at school. This is an attack on the rights of trans, nonbinary, and gender-diverse children which, contrary to what is being reported, is actually a very small number of kids.

A child's rights must always take precedence over a parent's obligations and responsibilities. Removing a child's rights in the name of "parental rights" is fundamentally anti-trans and harmful. This is something I cannot be a part of and I will not be associated with a provincial government that takes away the rights of children, especially vulnerable children.

"This is something I cannot be a part of and I will not be associated with a provincial government that takes away the rights of children, especially vulnerable children." This is from an individual that served for nine years, serving this government — proudly she says. Willingly, proudly. Championing human rights across this province. That is what it has come to, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Do they ever just . . . I don't know, does it ever have an impact? I wonder. Things like this.

Requiring teachers to not use a child's chosen name or pronoun turns teachers into bullies that cause psychological harm and schools into an unsafe place.

My own son is trans. His coming-out process was psychologically and physically harmful. This was even though he felt relatively confident that we, his parents, would still love him. He was terrified to tell us. He faced many mental health challenges and one of the reasons he is now out and thriving is because of the support he received at school. I hate to think of what would have happened if he had not had that support.

The suggestion that children will receive all of the counselling and guidance they need in schools is not realistic. Not only are already there no extra resources for 2SLGBTQ+ youth but there are also not enough resources for kids with learning or reading disabilities or those who require testing and counselling. There are not enough educational assistants. Class sizes are too big, and there are fewer and fewer supports for our province's teachers. Trans, nonbinary, and gender-diverse kids do not have a prayer of getting all the help they need and deserve.

"Trans, nonbinary, and gender-diverse kids do not have a prayer of getting all the help that they need and deserve."

Speaking of prayers, in 2008 I was given the honour of giving the keynote address in the annual Lieutenant Governor's prayer breakfast where I spoke about the importance of inclusion, diversity, and the strength and resilience of the Saskatchewan people. The speech resulted in me, a wheelchair user, working with the premier, Brad Wall, and a carpenter from the legislature to create a wheelchair-accessible podium. This podium was available for use and for loan to people with mobility disabilities when they gave speeches.

The podium was not just a tool; it was a symbol of equal opportunity. And after helping to create it, I started seeing all kinds of other ways I could help build a better Saskatchewan. I leaned into giving my time to the people of this great province. I now work as a volunteer board member for several community organizations because I believe in the power of inclusion and diversity and the need to build strong and effective communities where we can take care of

each other.

If this proposed legislation is enacted using the notwithstanding clause, Saskatchewan will no longer be a place that takes care of all its kids. This will be the only province in Canada where the rights of 2SLGBTQ+ children are not the same as other children in this or any other province. The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, like all other human rights commissions was and is part of the world's response to the Holocaust. Equal and inalienable rights are supposed to be just that.

I cannot tell you the depth of my disappointment in the government I have worked for and supported for the last nine years. But I promise you that my efforts as a community builder and activist will only become stronger because of this enormous letdown.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is certainly one of the most powerful letters I have ever read, and I can't imagine how difficult it was. Or maybe it wasn't difficult; I don't know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I certainly wouldn't want to speak for her. But it's one of many inspiring letters that certainly the introduction of this policy has prompted.

I'm going to read next from a letter, another letter. This is from someone I respect a lot. This is from Dr. Sean Tucker who again is a professor in the Faculty of Business Administration at the University of Regina. He's also a sessional lecturer at UBC [University of British Columbia]. I wouldn't want to try to sum up his research because I think it's quite expansive, but I know that he's a leader certainly in the health and safety arena and many others, Mr. Deputy Speaker. His letter reads as follows:

Dear Members of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly:

Next week you will gather to consider legislation concerning the government's recently announced student name and pronoun policy. The Premier has said that he will invoke the notwithstanding clause in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In response, the president of the Canadian Bar Association stated, "Efforts to curtail the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth to live openly and authentically are profoundly harmful, and the use of the clause to discriminate against or oppress marginalized persons or groups or to discriminate on the basis of gender is inconsistent with the values articulated in the Charter. Democracy in a pluralistic society is more than majority rule; it involves the recognition and protection of minorities, especially the vulnerable among us."

Using the notwithstanding clause to pre-emptively shield legislation impacting vulnerable youth from judicial oversight is wrong. It is a matter of public record that the government's student name and pronoun policy was hastily pulled together without any consultation or expert input. The Advocate for Children and Youth and Justice Megaw has joined critics in outlining significant gaps and inconsistencies within the policy, including sections that may violate the human rights of vulnerable students.

Please carefully consider the legislation that is before you

next week, to fully consider the implications and impact of the legislation. I urge you to hear from experts such as Saskatchewan's Advocate for Children and Youth, the commissioner of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, and others with expertise in family and human rights law. Do not rush your review. Above all, do not invoke the Charter's notwithstanding clause. Laws impacting children and youth must always remain open to review by the courts.

And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had an opportunity to read through portions of the report from the Advocate for Children and Youth, who has stated unequivocally, unequivocally, that this piece of legislation, that this policy is contrary to the Charter. Unequivocally, that it discriminates under the human rights code, *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* that the Minister of Advanced Education saw fit to expand so that it included a prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender identity, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She's unequivocal about that, unequivocal that it violates, unjustifiably, rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Listen to these experts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Listen to them. And what I failed to do earlier, which is something I wanted to do, is I failed to table a copy of the child rights impact assessment that the Children's Advocate completed. So that I will be tabling that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is a children's rights impact assessment that should be done before any government of this land enacts a new policy or new legislation that impacts children. In the absence of one, as there was a vacuum, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Advocate for Children and Youth completed one. And I hope by tabling this, the members opposite might give it a read. Just one copy today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I have time to read another letter. This is a letter . . . a young person I actually had the pleasure to meet. They joined the group from the John Howard Society delegation last week. I understand they're quite an accomplished Saskatchewan athlete. "I am writing to express . . ." Sorry, this is Ebony Campbell, identified as they/them, and they're a constituent of Regina Elphinstone-Centre, my riding, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the potential use of the notwithstanding clause in our province on October 10th, 2023, and I hope that you agree that this should be fought against.

The notwithstanding clause was designed as an exceptional provision intended to be used sparingly and as a last resort. Its potential use raises questions about the protection of our fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined in the Charter. It's crucial to ensure that such a significant step is only taken when absolutely necessary and after careful consideration. This is not one of those times. It is being used to push a bill that is not necessary and had very little consideration put into it.

As a trans person, and specifically as a trans athlete currently representing Saskatchewan on the national stage, I am increasingly concerned with the way things are going. The Saskatchewan Party will not stop with this policy; no

political group ever does.

Children, and particularly children who are members of minority groups, are an easy target. They cannot vote, and the children most affected by the current policy are likely to have little to no support from the people who claim to be voting with their best interests in mind.

I've been exceptionally lucky in my life to have great parents and supports. But many people don't have that, and this bill will cause harm.

I realize that many members of the Saskatchewan Party and the public don't truly care much about trans people. We are a small percentage of the population, perhaps an easy target. If people could stop ignoring those who have done the research on topics they know almost nothing about, that would be great.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to any and all actions you may take to address these concerns.

I want to thank Ebony Campbell who identifies as they/them, a constituent of Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

The Deputy Speaker: — The time now being 11 o'clock, this Assembly stands adjourned until 09:00 tomorrow morning.

[The Assembly adjourned at 23:00.]

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