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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Student Rights and Safer Schools

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to enter into this debate, and it's an important debate that we have. Too many of our youth are facing challenges in our communities that we can do something about, we can do something about. And we are here as legislators, it's the work that we do, and we should use the tools that we have to make sure our kids are safer in their communities.

And so today I'm very interested, and I'll read that motion now but I'll also read it at the end. But I want to make sure people at home know what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker. So I move today:

That the Assembly call on the government to enshrine in legislation the right of students throughout Saskatchewan to establish and lead groups that promote respect for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, including with the name, gay-straight alliance or gender sexual alliance or any other name which is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive and accepting of all students.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's my motion. And we're going to have a good debate; I'm very proud that we're going to be talking about this today. We've been raising this issue for several years now, and yet we have not seen the government move to concrete actions that kids can count on in our schools. And that's what we're talking about today, concrete actions that everyone knows that when we say that our schools will be safe, they will be safe. And when we mean that, we mean that. And too often with this government, they like to have their platitudes, but when we try to find out what does that really translate into, it's just, just not there.

So, Mr. Speaker, we know that Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, they have a program, schools are caring communities. And they talk about this comprehensive school community health approach that states, and I quote, "Each child in each school in each of

our communities deserves to be healthy, safe, engaged, and supported.”

Very lofty and very important, but when it comes to making this goal meaningful and equitable for all students, Saskatchewan unfortunately sadly lags behind other provinces here in Canada. And that’s particularly true, ensuring that our gender and sexually diverse students — and often we refer to gender sexually diverse students as GSD students — that they are not treated in the same way and they are not reaching their full potential and not gaining equitable access to all aspects of school life, whether it be academic, social, or extracurricular.

So we know, we know — and the research is out there, and it’s solid research — that school-based groups, the GSAs, gender and sexual alliances or gay-straight alliances, GSAs can help accomplish this goal. They’re an integral part of our political, social, and educational landscape with respect to upholding human rights law, supporting anti-oppressive and pro-respect educational frameworks, and providing an inclusive, healthy environment which improves student learning, responds to students’ needs and creates a supportive social climate, honours child and youth safety and strengthens proactive bullying prevention and, as well, it incorporates family realities into the learning communities in our schools.

Now provinces across Canada have recognized the vital role that GSAs play in meeting these goals, and they support educational outcomes and improve overall school-community health. And in some provinces the importance of GSAs are now protected by law. We’ve seen that in Ontario with Bill 13 and Manitoba with Bill 18 and just recently in March with Bill 10, which legally requires a school to meet the request of a student for a formation of a GSA. But here in Saskatchewan, unfortunately the situation is that students are permitted to form GSAs on the basis of administration discretion, and this is the crux of the problem. This is the crux of the problem because we have a minister who says that he’ll leave it up to the administration.

We know that while there has been good gains made, that it’s not protected in law. And that’s what we need to have. So while school boards across the country maintain specific anti-homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia policies that bolster the effectiveness of GSAs in an integrated and holistic school-community approach, not a single school board in Saskatchewan has explicit protection for GSD students. And fortunately while there has been some progress within the Saskatchewan context . . . And I just want to talk a little bit about this.

We had a member’s statement around Camp fYrefly. That was a really worthwhile initiative in terms of having a healthy supportive summer camp for students who are GSD, and this government now is providing \$25,000. Clearly that’s a very good step. We appreciate that, and we all applauded the member’s statement to that effect. But it’s not complete; it’s not finished. And we know unfortunately in Saskatchewan . . . And I’ll be talking about some of the situations that cause real concern for families here in Saskatchewan.

But there’s an intensifying need for tangible results in creating safer schools. You know,

an expanding youth voice is asserting and they're really, they're stressing this. And I've met with students across Saskatchewan, met with students, talked with students at Breaking the Silence Conference, met with students this past spring from Vancouver, that they're saying their lives matter. Their lives matter. And parents are demanding that their children be treated with dignity and respect. And so a growing community is asking and really demanding that Saskatchewan schools support the implementation of GSAs to help meet educational and social and bullying prevention needs.

And I just think about the march that happened in Saskatoon last October where over 60 people met and walked across a bridge in Saskatoon, demanding action. And it wasn't a very nice day, in fact it was a rainy miserable day, but they still met and said this is an important issue. This is an important issue. So if we do this, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan can move closer to schools being caring communities for all students and for all family realities in a much more meaningful way.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to just talk a little bit, and I know the time is going quickly, but we need to just step back and understand that GSAs, and the term GSAs, it's from gay-straight alliance but has, like I said, has evolved into gender sexual alliance. It's said to have originated in the early 1980s and refers to school-based, student-run groups that provide a safe space for youth to discuss issues related to diversity and sexual and romantic orientation.

But today GSAs in our schools are welcoming spaces for all students that provide a niche for social interaction and education. They provide like-minded camaraderie and connection, much like other school-based that are commonly found in our schools, such as drama groups and astronomy group clubs. But GSAs are inclusive right across the spectrum of diversity — gender, attraction, expression, family and friend realities. And there is no need for students to self-identify or articulate their orientation in order to join the GSA group unless they wish to do so. Respect and acceptance of diversity are the only requirements for membership. GSAs are recognized as anti-oppressive spaces within the school community, and many students who feel they are on the outside of the larger, normative majority seek anti-bullying refuge, safety, and friendship, and shared expressions within the GSA groups.

In some schools, GSAs act simply as a crucial space where students are able to eat lunch safely and find necessary reprieve from bullying and assault. And I just want to stress this, this is especially relevant with statistical reality that GSD students are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers, and over half of GSD students have seriously considered suicide. Additionally, studies have shown that Canadian schools with GSAs may reduce the odds of suicidal thoughts and attempts among GSD and straight students. And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to highlight that because that's a huge issue here in Saskatchewan and I'm quoting from a report: *Suicides, Health Provincial Ranking: How Canada Performs*.

And here in Saskatchewan the question is, how has the suicide rate changed in the provinces and territories over the past decade? Over the past decades suicide rates in Canada have actually been in decline. But what is concerning is the suicide rates have

risen in half the provinces. Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan all had higher suicide rates in 2011 than in 2000. And so here we have a real issue, Mr. Speaker. And I think that when we are talking about providing safer schools, we just can't be saying that with lip service. This is a real issue and has life and death consequences when you have students who are having suicidal ideas, that we really need to do something. And when the stats are in about Saskatchewan, the fact that we're one of the provinces where suicide rates have gone up, this is a problem.

And I want to just refer to a news story on March 13th, 2015. And the headline is, "Morgan says no GSA legislation planned for Saskatchewan." He refers to, and it says here: "Saskatchewan's Education Minister Don Morgan said Wednesday that introducing similar legislation would be unnecessary because it's already an expectation and a part of education policy." And we have not yet seen this policy. And we heard that this would be coming through with the bullying report that was done. That's fair enough, but that's been now some time. We have not actually seen this policy that was referred to by the Premier yesterday or the minister. He keeps referring to this policy but we have not, we have not seen the actual policy.

So we hope by the end of this debate that the other side would table the policy. I know that they might be quoting from it today, and I hope they do. And if they do, that they will actually table the documents so that we can actually see the policy that the minister keeps referring to and the Premier keeps referring to.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe every student in Saskatchewan, regardless of factors like where they live and what their school community looks like, should be guaranteed fundamental rights. We should be entrenching best practices for preventing discrimination and bullying and promising that those best practices will be followed for every student in every school.

Just as culture shifts and society evolves, so must our learning communities. Governments and school boards across the country are working to protect the rights of GSD children and youth through a commitment to resources and supports which assist in ensuring all students are reaching their full potential and gaining equitable access to all aspects of school life.

This is being done through legislating that a student's request for life-saving support of a GSA cannot be denied, by creating policies that uphold human rights, and by supporting diversity includes the professional learning and capacity building amongst school staff. And, Mr. Speaker, this is the gist of the bill that I introduced just a week or so ago, 612, the respect for diversity and student bill of rights.

Mr. Speaker, there's lots of people that are watching this today and have done an awful lot of work. And I want to thank the folks at Avenue Community Centre, Amanda Guthrie and Rachel Loewen Walker. Those folks are strong advocates in saying this is the kind of work that needs to be done. And also Chandra McIvor from Egale Canada, who's worked tirelessly on this for many years. I want to really also give a shout out to people, Breaking the Silence folks.

Every year they put together a conference in Saskatoon about creating a safe space for GSD students to be able to talk about their challenges. And this is one that's important to them. So Don Cochrane, Margie Corbett, Fran Forsberg, so many; the Vancouver kids that I met with today and the Saskatoon kids; and Halla Scott here in Regina, who had the courage to come forward and raise the concern about not having a GSA in her school.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read the motion I'd be putting forward, and this is:

That this Assembly call on the government to enshrine in legislation the right of students throughout Saskatchewan to establish and lead groups that promote respect for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, including with the name "gay-straight alliance" or "gender sexuality alliance" or any other name which is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive and accepting of all students.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important motion. I'm glad we have the opportunity here to talk about this. Kids are watching this, and we're listening very closely to what the government will say about this today. I would like to table my motion right now. I move my motion right now. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The motion by the member for Saskatoon Centre is:

That this Assembly call on the government to enshrine in legislation the right of students throughout Saskatchewan to establish and lead groups that promote respect for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, including with the name "gay-straight alliance" or "gender sexuality alliance" or any other name which is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive and accepting of all students.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Saskatchewan Rivers.

Hon. Ms. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand in my place and participate today in this debate regarding the opposition's motion which I will read:

That this Assembly call on the government to enshrine in legislation the right of students throughout Saskatchewan to establish and lead groups that promote respect for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, including with the name "gay-straight alliance" or "gender sexuality alliance" or any other name which is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive and accepting of all students.

Mr. Speaker, our students in Saskatchewan are getting services and support that they require, so therefore we don't need legislation, and I will discuss why. Do we need legislation to be kind to each other, to listen, to give respect? We as society, as a whole, collectively can do our part. As leaders, as parents, we can teach our children to be respectful and kind.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education is committed to ensuring schools are safe, and they will work with school divisions to establish supports and policy developments for all students. We, as a government, as society as a whole, want people to come to their own consciousness of identity, to arrive at their own sense of self, to have families and loved ones that they can mentor and enjoy a high quality of life here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, our Saskatchewan school divisions, all 28, are trusted to take care of the regional and different demographics that reside in our province. They have the best interests of Saskatchewan students, and the policy of this government is to work with students, teachers, and other school divisions to implement recommendations in the province and the provincial action plan.

I have a letter here, April 28th, 2015, addressed to Minister Morgan. It says, “Best regards from the Saskatchewan School Boards Association,” and I’ll read you a paragraph:

I write this letter to advocate for continued endorsement and respect for the autonomy of locally elected school boards in our province. The Saskatchewan School Boards Association firmly believes that our 28 member boards are in the best position to make decisions at the local level, including the establishment of gay-straight alliances. Introducing legislation to make such decisions mandatory limits boards’ autonomy and we feel it is unnecessary as school divisions are responding to diverse and changing student needs every day and will continue to do so.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, our government is also providing \$25,000 to the fYrefly Saskatchewan to support gender and sexually diverse youth throughout the province. The annual Camp fYrefly in Saskatchewan is a camp for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, intersexed youth and their allies between the ages of 14 and 24. The camp’s co-founder, Kris Wells, developed the camp as he believed caring adults could mentor youth to live fully in a world that embraces diversity. It is called in Canada the largest gender minority youth leadership retreat.

Supporting diversity, Mr. Speaker, is nothing new to me. It’s nothing new to our government. The spirit is here in Saskatchewan with the way we live our lives of acceptance and tolerance of each person’s uniqueness. Working together, we can make Saskatchewan a great place to live, to raise your family, to work. This government is a team that is committed to positive growth and change, and we value Saskatchewan people’s strengths and all that they bring to the diversity of our great province. All aspects of Saskatchewan should be embraced and celebrated.

Mr. Speaker, released on March 16th, 2015 is a Saskatchewan report, “Government Continues to Respond to Bullying Report.” I will read you a part of it.

“Our goal is to ensure schools and communities are safe, welcoming and inclusive for our students,” Education Minister Don Morgan said. “This investment also supports our government’s commitment to working with community

organizations to help respond to the recommendations in Saskatchewan's Plan to Address Bullying and Cyberbullying.”

It also goes on to say:

“FYrefly in schools is a welcomed educational initiative in Saskatchewan,” Camp fYrefly Saskatchewan Co-Chair Reverend Carla Blakley said. “The Y in fYrefly is capitalized because youth are important. FYrefly in schools aims to reduce discrimination and bullying, especially against sexually and gender minority youth, so that a safe, caring school environment can be provided for all Saskatchewan youth.”

Mr. Speaker, the NDP calls for rights that already exist. They are calling for the right to freedom of conscience, opinion, and belief; freedom of expression; and freedom of assembly in association. However, Mr. Speaker, this already exists. In section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it states:

2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:
 - (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
 - (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
 - (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
 - (d) freedom of association.

Mr. Speaker, I have a quote here from Dan Shier of Queen City Pride, Global News Regina, dated March 12th, 2015, when asked if Saskatchewan needs legislation for GSAs: “. . . I don't see it [currently] as being a huge necessity [just] because students are getting the services and the spaces that they require.”

Mr. Speaker, the proposed 2015-16 budget allocation will support the continued implementation of Saskatchewan's action plan to address bullying and cyberbullying. Our government has a policy in place and we don't react to everything with legislation.

The Ministry of Education has taken steps in 2014-15 to implement the provincial action plan, including training and learning opportunities that are being provided to school divisions. Twenty-eight school divisions have completed or committed to training to access and respond to violence or threats in their schools. The Canadian Red Cross is training adults and youths to prevent and address bullying and promote positive relationships, using respected programming. The Saskatoon restorative action program models school-based restorative action programs for others in the province.

In spring of 2014, over 900 participants engaged in a massive open online course intended to support students in learning appropriate and responsible behaviour online. There's a policy guide for schools to further support appropriate and responsible behaviour online which will be available in spring of 2015, and our government has also taken steps, including an online professional resource to assist school divisions to provide safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environment for all students including gender and

sexual minorities . . . are being finalized.

So, Mr. Speaker, our government is addressing this without legislation. Action has been taken to support students in having an anonymous, safe place to seek help through Kids Help Phone, and 40 classrooms-to-counsellor sessions have increased awareness of mental health issues to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behaviours in children and youth.

Mr. Speaker, there is more action. We're influencing positive social change in their schools, communities, and online through the I Am Stronger community grant program. This program provides small grants of up to 1,000 each for youth-led initiatives to address bullying and promote healthy relationships.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education is committed to ensuring that schools are safe and inclusive environments for students and that student success is appropriate, a priority, and that everyone feels safe and included. Research and practice indicate that when students do not feel safe and supported, their learning and well-being are undermined. So I hope if the opposition feel that someone . . .

The Speaker: Time has elapsed. I recognize the member for Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to enter into debate here this afternoon as it relates to the rights of students and the rights to the freedoms and safety that all students and people deserve. And I do so . . . It's nice to actually have the group from Blaine Lake, the grade 7 and 8 students here today along with their teachers here today, to be a part of this discussion, and certainly I'd be interested in hearing their specific perspective on this matter as well, Mr. Speaker.

But quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we see an opportunity to provide the leadership that Saskatchewan students deserve, that Saskatchewan people deserve, by enshrining rights that are theirs, Mr. Speaker, but rights that far too often are compromised, Mr. Speaker. And when we think of the pressures that so many gay and lesbian or bisexual and transgendered students are facing across Saskatchewan, or adults and those within communities, Mr. Speaker, we owe it to them to provide them a law of the land that enshrines their right to freedom, to respect, and to make sure that there's the ability to have a GSA, a gay-straight alliance be able to be formed within their school.

And I know there's been many leaders on this front in Saskatchewan, and to each and every one of them I say, thank you. And I think of so many individual leaders, even within the gay rights movement itself in Saskatchewan, that have worked to advance the rights of many, Mr. Speaker. And I say, thank you.

I hear stories, Mr. Speaker, of a different time that wasn't so long ago, that when it was the annual time to come together, to put together a gay parade, Mr. Speaker, that those individuals were very few that would get out and march. And many, Mr. Speaker, felt they had to cover their faces with bags because they felt that there'd be repercussions and vindictive actions within the community, Mr. Speaker. This is not long ago in

Saskatchewan. Those brave leaders have helped advance the rights of all in this province, Mr. Speaker, and to all of those leaders that have been a part of that movement — the movement, Mr. Speaker, for the advancement of human rights — I say, thank you.

I know now the difference, Mr. Speaker. We have significant progress at all levels of society, but we have a lot further still to go. But I know soon we'll be coming around to the Queen City Pride activities, and I look forward to being engaged. I look forward to marching proudly in support with allies in that parade once again, Mr. Speaker, as I always do. I look forward to joining the flag raising, along with other members as well, Mr. Speaker, and with confidence, showing our respect for one another.

And I also think of so many within our community who have shown leadership on this front. And I think of Camp fYrefly and the leaders there, whether it's James McNinch or whether it's Carla Blakely, and so many others that have come together to provide this program and these supports that are so critical to those that are able to connect with it, Mr. Speaker.

I've been out to Camp fYrefly, Mr. Speaker. I've listened to some of the stories being shared about some of the isolation and exclusion that occurs with kids from all across our province despite, I suspect, very good efforts of many within schools and communities, Mr. Speaker. And I hear of the feelings, Mr. Speaker, and the pressures around self-harm, and we know the tragic and ugly circumstances around things like suicide, Mr. Speaker. We know about too many young people not being able to grow and be all that they can be, Mr. Speaker. We know too many that are limited, Mr. Speaker. So I think of those like Camp fYrefly.

I think of the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] Pride Centre, and I think of the leadership here to establish the University of Regina Pride Centre. These are important centres that connect and change a culture of a campus and provide supports and confidence and safety to all, Mr. Speaker.

I think of Dan Shier and the Queen City Pride here in Regina and so many other members with Queen City Pride. I know so many of them well, and I thank them for their leadership.

I've noticed that Mr. Shier's been quoted often by government opposite trying to suggest that he doesn't support legislation for GSAs, Mr. Speaker. Well that isn't the case, Mr. Speaker. They're not sharing the entire quote. So I'll provide the rest of Mr. Shier's quote from March 12th, 2015, the story. The quote from Mr. Shier is, "Having legislation I think would be a good thing . . ." Then his quote continues, Mr. Speaker. So I would urge members opposite not to play fast and loose with leaders' quotes within our community and to recognize the voice that they're providing, Mr. Speaker.

I think of leaders within the Avenue Community Centre, Mr. Speaker. I think of Amanda Guthrie. I think of those that have been involved there before and still providing leadership in other capacities, like Chandra McIvor, Mr. Speaker, pushing forward to make sure that society is finally providing and ensuring that promise, the way we should

be to all Saskatchewan people, whether gay, whether lesbian, whether bisexual or transgendered, Mr. Speaker.

I think of those founders of Breaking the Silence and those that come together every single year up in the University of Saskatchewan, working with educators, working with academics, working with everyday people in the community, Mr. Speaker. And I think of people like Don Cochrane and Fran Forsberg who have been pioneers and leaders on this front in pushing for progress.

I think of TransSask Saskatchewan and people like Mikayla Schultz who's provided me a greater perspective and understanding on this front, Mr. Speaker. I think of that important leadership. And to recognize something that we've worked with government on as an accomplishment would be the changes to the Human Rights Code. Something that we should now be looking at directly is enshrining the rights of students to form GSAs within their schools, Mr. Speaker.

I think of the United Church, Mr. Speaker, and other faith leaders and organizations, Mr. Speaker. But the United Church for which I grew up in, Mr. Speaker, I think of Reverend Ken Powers, Mr. Speaker, and the debates that weren't so long ago about having a gay minister, for example, Mr. Speaker, or about gay marriage. And I remember those pressures and discussions within a church and the tensions at times that were present in those discussions. And I remember people like my dad, Mr. Speaker, who was an educator as well and affirming as well and taking on that debate within the church in resolving ourselves together as a group to make sure we were affirming to the rights of many, Mr. Speaker. And you know, these are many people, Mr. Speaker, stepping out, speaking out at times where rights often weren't protected, Mr. Speaker.

So what I'm trying to get at, Mr. Speaker, is the leadership in this province has come, but from the work of many. I'm proud of the record as New Democrats to advance agendas around human rights and gay rights, Mr. Speaker, and human rights. I'm proud to continue to provide that advocacy, and I'm thankful to the school boards across Saskatchewan and to the historical schools and the roles of the associate schools to work towards making sure this happens.

But it's not good enough, Mr. Speaker, to simply allow this, you know, to sort of be the unwritten rule of the land. It's important, Mr. Speaker, to enshrine these rights by law, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we're calling for. Mr. Speaker, the realities for too many kids across Saskatchewan is that they're isolated. They're left in a spot of hurt. They're left in a spot of harm, Mr. Speaker, and we shouldn't accept that. We should let them know that they're not alone.

We shouldn't leave it for a grade 7 student or a grade 5 student or a grade 11 student who's figuring out who they are, Mr. Speaker, and realizing that they might be different from their friends, to be the one that has to provide the leadership, Mr. Speaker. We, with the strength of this Legislative Assembly, and us as members of this Assembly should be providing that leadership. And we should have the confidence, Mr. Speaker, to do that here in this Assembly. They deserve nothing less.

I also think of the teachers, Mr. Speaker, that this is an important, affirming, enshrinement of a law, Mr. Speaker. Certainly I've, as a teacher before entering into elected office, I have friends, Mr. Speaker. And I think of one friend who is a teacher and a lesbian, Mr. Speaker, who lived that in isolation from her school community, Mr. Speaker, lived that in isolation from many of her staff members, lived that in isolation from the community at large. And these are the kind . . . And this is not very long ago, Mr. Speaker, in fact just a few years ago. I know how difficult it was for her to come out to that school community and the very pressures.

So I think we owe it to future generations, we certainly owe it to current generations to stand up, Mr. Speaker, as an Assembly and to enshrine these rights and to make sure that gay-straight alliances are able to be formed all across Saskatchewan. So I'm thankful for our school board partners. I'm thankful for the teachers that are working across Saskatchewan. I'm thankful for those pioneers and leaders, Mr. Speaker, that have pushed and worked for progress, recognizing we have a long ways still to go, Mr. Speaker.

I've been appreciative of government to work on aspects with transgendered rights with the Human Rights Code. Now it's time that we take the important step and enshrine the right of gay-straight alliances all across Saskatchewan. It's my honour to enter debate here today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Regina Douglas Park.

Mr. Marchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, indeed a pleasure to rise to be able to speak to this motion today, and I want to approach it from a little bit different perspective I think than what we've heard so far. You know, Mr. Speaker, as adults, as parents, as community leaders, as teachers, I believe that we have a slightly higher purpose in life. You know, Mr. Speaker, we realize and agree that there are bad people out there and that sometimes we need laws to protect the public, but I believe that our goal is somewhat higher. We need to be able to create a more civilized society, and in that sense our goal is somewhat greater.

It's important that we advance humankind in general, to teach our children to be creative, critical thinkers, and problem solvers. To be kind and judicious, I think that's what our role is, to respect and treat all others with respect like they treat themselves, to do unto others as they would have done unto them. I have to ask the question, Mr. Speaker, do we need to legislate that? Or do we teach that through modelling it through the values that we live by on a daily basis?

You know, Mr. Speaker, there's a saying that we have: you can do things right or you can do things the right way. By doing things right, in my mind, there's a hint that there is some process, some regulation, some laws that we must follow. By doing the right thing, I believe that there's a morality to that, an approach that is just and right and that all people should live by. And as parents we need to model those values for our children.

You know, Mr. Speaker, a while back my wife and I we're playing, we decided to go and

play a few holes of golf after supper out at the Wascana golf course. And at that time the green of the second hole bordered the grid road called Fleet Street and what we in Regina kind of know as Rainbow bridge. Some will be familiar with Rainbow bridge.

We were just finishing putting and walking off the green and in the distance I could see this motocross bike just screaming down the grid road. And I said to my wife, geez look at those people, they're going to kill themselves. As soon as that bike hits that grid road, it's going to go all over the place. As it approached, it got a little bit closer I said, you know Karen, I think that's our daughter. And as the bike screamed past us, I said to Karen, that is our daughter. And like the dutiful father I decided that we would put an end to that. So I hopped the fence and took a nick out of my thigh on the barbed wire fence, which made the blood flow a little bit stronger, and jumped out onto the road with the golf club hanging out and the other arm hanging out, standing right in the middle of the road. I was going to stop that bike on the way back, and we were going to deal with this.

And sure enough that bike came screaming back. And they saw this guy standing out in the middle of the road, golf club out there, and I thought they thought they met their Waterloo, Mr. Speaker. The motorbike stopped. Our daughter looked at me and got off the motorbike. And it was really quite cute to see her walking down that bike path on her way home because she knew that's where she was going. And the young man, nice fellow that he was, got off his bike and started pushing it down the highway back to his home.

Now if I'd have done things right, I'd have reported that to the police; I'd have followed. He was driving without a licence, da da, da da, da da. But instead, at the urging of my wife, we did things right and kind of took things into our own hands and got our daughter home safely. And I knew that she thought she was going to be grounded for, well probably grounded for life, but that really didn't take place. And in her case, we had a conversation with her and talked about, you know, decision making, and as you grow older you're going to have to make other important decisions in your life.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, because of that particular instance — and I know in the young fellow's case as well — I know that our daughter is much the stronger mother for having had that situation dealt with in the right way, as opposed to doing things right and following some piece of legislation. So my point here is that some things require legislation and rules and regulations to guide us. Other things don't where we can model them and help grow our children.

I think of another situation that happened to me in one of the high schools that I was at, Mr. Speaker. And we had a Friday night dance, and I think you can all appreciate that on Friday night dances in a high school, sometimes things take place that we don't want to take place. And you've got a whole number of staff out there that are helping to supervise. They're giving up their Friday nights or whatever to supervise a high school dance, but invariably some things don't go quite the way they're supposed to. At the end of this particular function, we had about a 200-person melee out in the parking lot. There were visitors from other collegiates, etc. And it wasn't a lot of fun for me, as the principal, and for our staff as supervisors and for the parents that were there as

chaperones, etc., etc.

Well Monday morning comes along and you have to deal with this. You've got a 600-student-body facility that is looking to leadership and their teachers for some sort of guidance. Now we could have done things right and ended all high school dances for the rest of the year, because that's what parents might have expected. That's what people around may have thought was a good and right thing to do. But if we had done that we would have taught our children nothing. And as a result of that, that particular instance, the staff got together and said, we're not going to punish the entire student body for the actions of a few. And in most of the cases it wasn't even our students, so why would we, why would we do that, Mr. Speaker?

So we did the right thing and we were able to have a conversation with our students about how we go forward and the kind of decisions that we make. And I believe that as a result of that, the good work and professionalism of the teachers at that school taught those children how to become better citizens and behave in that society. So I make that point because there are times when you have to make a law. I don't believe that this is one of them.

You know, our . . . the member from Regina Rosemont is quoted in *Hansard* as saying, "What this side of the Assembly . . ." and I quote, "What this side of the Assembly is simply advocating is that government start listening to the school boards across this province." And as my colleague from Prince Albert noted earlier, that's exactly what this government is trying to do. We had a request from our school divisions, all 28 of them, to allow them to be autonomous, which is what we charge them to be. We've got 28 different school districts representing 28 different geographic and culturally diverse areas of our province, Mr. Speaker. They are the ones that are in the best position to make decisions around what's best for their communities, and it's our intent to allow them to do that.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, for me and in my mind, it should be for all of us. I believe that we fail our children, Mr. Speaker, and we fail society in general when we need a law to enforce what is morally right . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Holy smoke, one minute.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from a journal article that I discovered while looking at this:

A civilized society's first line of defence is not the law, police and courts but customs, traditions, and moral values. Behavioral norms, mostly transmitted by example, word of mouth and religious teachings, represent a body of wisdom distilled over the ages through experience and trial and error. They include important thou-shalt-nots such as shalt not murder, shalt not steal, shalt not lie and cheat, but they also include all those courtesies one might call ladylike and gentlemanly conduct. The failure to fully transmit values and traditions to subsequent generations represents one of the failings of the so-called greatest generation.

Mr. Speaker, and I continue the quote:

Policemen and laws can never replace customs, traditions and moral values as a means for regulating human behavior. At best, the police and criminal justice system are the last desperate line of defense for a civilized society. Our increased reliance on laws to regulate behavior is a measure of how uncivilized we've become.

Mr. Speaker, our school divisions, our schools, and our parents and our children are attaining that higher purpose, are making our society more civilized on their own. They are doing so without a law. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Riversdale.

Ms. Chartier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter the debate on this motion:

To enshrine in legislation the right of students throughout Saskatchewan to establish and lead groups that promote respect for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, including with the name gay-straight alliances or gender sexuality alliance, or any other name which is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive and accepting of all students.

We've got three jurisdictions leading the way here, Mr. Speaker — Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta — who have enshrined this ability of students to start GSAs in legislation. It's interesting. I listened yesterday to the Premier when he defended not entrenching the right of students to establish gay-straight alliances in legislation. He argued that it's not the Ministry of . . . he argued that it's policy, that it's the Ministry of Education's policy to support these when students ask and argued that they're happening without legislation.

Firstly I'd tell the Premier and the minister that they're mistaken when they say students haven't been prevented from starting GSAs. I know my colleague from Saskatoon Centre has some examples. And just yesterday I was chatting with a gay teacher, a constituent of mine, who was telling me about one school, two years ago, where she worked, and she said the kids were literally begging to start a GSA. The principal flatly refused because he said it wasn't the right image the school wanted to portray. Although this was two years ago, the teacher said that she's heard very recently from these students that this particular principal has not budged and there is no GSA in the school despite the students' desire and the real need for one. She talked about one of the students at this particular school, a gay student who was cutting herself, Mr. Speaker, and really could have benefitted from a GSA and knowing that she has allies in the school, and there were allies wanting to start that process.

Secondly there is a huge difference between legislation and policy. When this government's own Law Reform Commission talks about legislation versus policy, it points out that legislation has official status that emphasizes its importance and encourages compliance. As per the anecdote I just mentioned about the school and the principal being unwilling to allow the establishment of a GSA, this policy obviously isn't always being followed. Maybe not every principal is aware of it, or perhaps they realize

how easy it is to ignore a policy as opposed to legislation. When you ignore legislation, Mr. Speaker, you are breaking the law.

We want the ability of students and teachers to be able to establish GSAs to be codified in law to ensure that these GSAs can exist. Having something in law isn't just about making sure schools are following the law. Ultimately that is what we want as a society, but it's also a great opportunity to educate citizens, teachers, young people, parents about why supporting all students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression is important.

This law would be an opportunity to have a sustained dialogue about diversity and about human rights. It also makes it far easier for students to start a GSA when they know the legislation is on their side. It's a pretty scary thing being a teenager at the best of times, Mr. Speaker, speaking from experience, having been one myself, and now having a teenager. Life isn't particularly smooth and easy, and imagine being a LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] student and being fearful and feeling judged already and having to go and ask a teacher or a principal, but not being sure that this is something that can happen.

Amanda Guthrie of the Avenue Community Centre in Saskatoon says the current method of having a student or group of students request a GSA potentially puts them in an uncomfortable position with their principal or a teacher. She says, "If that student knows there's provincial legislation backing that request, there isn't going to be as much fear when they ask their principal or teacher for a GSA."

It is also important to point out that this is a matter of life and death for some of our children. In Saskatchewan our suicide rates continue to grow. In fact, we have a higher suicide rate in 2011 than we did in 2000. We're going in the wrong direction, Mr. Speaker. Just to provide some context to those numbers and how they relate to the issue of creating safe and supportive schools for our children and foster better mental health, according to statistics from PFLAG Canada, 43 per cent of trans-identified students attempt suicide; 30 per cent of suicides are LGBT; gay teens are 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide and are 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression compared with peers from families that report no or low levels of family rejection.

These are some other stats that are shocking that I'll give you now, and that supporting GSAs in schools could improve. LGBT students hear anti-gay slurs an average of 26 times a day. Twenty-six per cent of LGBT students are told to leave home. Nearly a fifth of students are physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation, and over a tenth because of their gender expression.

This government's own mental health and addictions action plan — currently an action plan with no action, I might add — supports gay-straight alliances. Under recommendation 12.2 around improving service responsiveness to diversities including gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities, it says, "Gay-Straight Alliances in schools can help build social support networks and reduce isolation and stigma, which are risk factors

for mental illness.”

Mr. Speaker, I can cite statistics and tell you what I think, but sometimes it’s best to hear from those who are impacted by the laws or lack of laws. As I mentioned earlier, I was talking to a gay constituent of mine yesterday who, when I told her of the debate here today, she said, “That is a debate I want in on.”

Well, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to give her that opportunity. This is what she wrote to me:

To say that you are allowed to be gay and technically no one can do anything to you based on that fact, does not make up for the strong undertow of our heteronormative narrative and the homophobia that still plagues us as a society. For youth to thrive in their schools and communities, they need to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe and supported.

She went on to write to me of her own experiences. I’d like to outline them here because I think she says it better than me:

As a gay teacher who was once a gay youth, I feel for the students who do not feel safe and who do not have the support at home. In the short years I have been a teacher, I’ve had numerous students come out to me, telling me they haven’t told anyone else. In this country, in this day and age, that is not acceptable. To have to hide an unchangeable part of who you are every day takes a terrible toll on both your physical and mental health. I know from experience.

I went through years of trying to change myself and hide myself. As a youth myself, it was never an option to talk about my sexuality. I want for the youth of today to not have to experience that, to be able to find acceptance of themselves and live up to their true potential. I know what it feels like to question yourself and to think there is something wrong with you. We can prevent this for today’s students by having open dialogues in an environment where staff and students share a clear understanding that discrimination will not be tolerated.

Even the discussion of “should we allow GSAs in schools” is embarrassing and pitiful. To other people, such as myself, to hold meetings and press conferences to decide if we deserve the right to congregate and celebrate and lift up who we are, puts us in the category of “less than.” Think about it — the lack of humanity LGBT people are given just through having to decide if we should allow GSAs in school.

But what if someone who doesn’t support gay marriage or gay people in general becomes offended by their children hearing that gay people exist? [She asks that rhetorical question.] Then perhaps public education is not for them.

In the end, I am happy these conversations are happening, as insulting as I find them, in pure hope that there will be a positive outcome. People are gay. You don’t have to be gay, and you don’t have to believe in gay marriage. It exists. It is not dependent upon your beliefs. We exist.

As a gay teacher, I feel safe when I enter a new school and see that a GSA exists. I feel safe and I feel like I can relax and no one will hurt me. I feel when the administration and the staff have GSAs in a school, that I can exist as myself.

I'm 31 years old and still sweat and shake when introducing my wife to people. This does not come from an imaginary fear I've conjured up about how some people may react to me. This has come from real experiences: when I was told I could not teach a health class because of my sexuality; when I was told to lie about my spouse or else parents would be pulling kids from my class; when a student ran away literally screaming "get her away from me" when the class saw a picture of my beautiful albeit gay family; when on the playground kids yell "eww" when my daughter proudly introduces us as her two moms. This list hurts and, sadly, goes on. And so yes, the importance of GSAs in schools is very real for me.

I'm 31 years old and I'm still working through the same of my existence, because I live in society who on a grand scale accepts me, but on the day-to-day scale still has a long way to go.

Clearly I feel GSAs protect not only the students, but also myself against parents who may not agree with my gayness, against staff who morally object to who I am, and against students who have never received proper education on sexuality and so lump me in with pedophiles and believe me to be a threat.

I worry about my daughters having gay parents and being taunted or bullied on those grounds. A GSA in their school would put my mind at ease as a parent. The lack of GSAs in our schools causes harm to students of gay parents, to gay and trans students, and to gay and trans staff.

Having a GSA in a school causes no harm to anyone. It seems like a no-brainer to me. What we are looking at is the difference of possibly offending a population of people by having them, versus actual life and death of LGBT students and staff. Which one should take precedence? Offending those who have decided to take offence? Or disregarding the importance of the life and well-being of those who did not decide to be gay, bisexual, lesbian, or trans? Take it out of the hands of individual schools where the administration may not be supportive or staff may not be educated on the importance of the matter . . .

The Speaker: Time has elapsed. I recognize the member for Saskatoon Sutherland.

Mr. Merriman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the two claps, my colleagues.

I very much appreciate being asked to enter into this debate because I think it's an important debate and I think it's something that isn't certainly new to the province of Saskatchewan and it's not new to Canada, Mr. Speaker.

The member from Saskatoon Centre had mentioned that during Premier's estimates, and I

think the member from Saskatoon Riversdale had mentioned that there was no policy that the government had formed, and I just wanted to give them an update. And again I think they have a little bit of trouble with this, Mr. Speaker, but uncle Google was able to help me out in about eight seconds and it was able to find the Minister of Education policy statement, Student alliances for gender and sexual diversity in Saskatchewan schools. So if they want this, Mr. Speaker . . . I know the member from Saskatoon Centre wanted it tabled, but it is on the Internet, and we can certainly help him out if they need something to be able to help one of their researchers be able to find this, Mr. Speaker.

But I guess one of the things I want to talk about first of all, Mr. Speaker, is, again this is nothing new. Bullying, sexual diversity is not something new that just happened with this government. And I guess my concern is, Mr. Speaker, on what the opposition did when they were 16 years in government, why they didn't introduce some anti-bullying legislation, why they didn't step up to the plate. As the member from Regina Rosemont said that a lot of the people unfortunately had to put masks over when they went to the pride . . . And I guess I don't understand why they weren't more supportive now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the people out there. Why weren't they introducing some legislation then?

And I also want to allude to a couple of things that my colleagues were able to say, and I think the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] from Saskatoon rivers put it very eloquently, Mr. Speaker, is we need to be respectful to each other. And this is not something that the government is in charge of, is being respectful to each other. And as the MLA from Douglas Park, the very vocal person during question period, Mr. Speaker, was saying, is this is something that we have to teach our children.

Now there's a difference between teaching your child and sitting down and having a conversation with him about everything, about bullying, about GSAs, about life, about them going through difficult times in their life. This is not something that the government needs to be able to step in between a relationship between a parent and a child, or the child and the school, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The reason that the legislation I think is coming from, the request for legislation is coming from the opposition is they don't understand and they don't see the perspective of the . . . You know what? The school boards, the autonomy of the school boards and the conversations between school boards, parents, and students is critical. This is not something that the government needs to be jumping in the middle of and telling everybody what to do.

On the bullying side of things, and again this isn't something that is brand new, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that anybody can stand up in this legislature, or at any point in time, and say that they weren't bullied or intimidated by somebody or that they weren't somehow feeling inferior or less than worthy with the rest of their peers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I guess it's how we teach our kids to deal with that.

The Minister of Central Services worked for months doing our anti-bullying, cyberbullying report, Mr. Speaker, and it was something that was very, very timely, Mr. Speaker, because we needed to make sure that students felt safe. And now talking specifically about the GSAs, anecdotally we've heard from them a couple of . . . while

that there was some school boards . . . We heard something from the member of Riversdale, the MLA from Riversdale, that happened two years ago. Well I think things have changed in the last couple of years, Mr. Speaker, that the GSAs are in schools.

We do have something. We have policy in place to be able to say to the school boards, you must provide this if it is required. Now why would the opposition think that we have to tell them that they must do this? That goes everything against the school boards' autonomy, Mr. Speaker. They are in there for a specific reason, to be able to look out for their local needs. They're voted into their positions just like we are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to be able to make decisions for their area.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's very concerning again why the NDP seem to think that they know better than everybody else, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They need to be able to tell the school boards what to do because obviously they think that the school boards don't know enough, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And then even yesterday they went on a little further and they went again today in question period, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is they went on to say that the Privacy Commissioner wasn't capable of doing their jobs, that we had to have a person to check the checker on what was going on certainly.

And I don't understand again, again yesterday, and today I did it in a member's statement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why the NDP think that they know better than everybody, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They know better than the public servants that are out there working on our behalf. They've thrown many public servants under the bus. The Privacy Commissioner, they obviously don't have very much confidence in that because we haven't even let the Privacy Commissioner do their report yet and they're already questioning their report. Again, public . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . and thank you, the Health Quality Council. Again in my member's statement the Leader of the Opposition just absolutely slammed them. They want everybody in Saskatchewan to believe that they know better than everybody else in Saskatchewan. They know better than business. They know better than school boards, public health commissioners, and certainly, especially on the gay-straight alliance, they know better than everybody else. They've heard some anecdotally.

The minister has stood up here and said he has not received any complaints from any school board saying that there was a refusal to set up a GSA, so why do we have to force them? Why is it the NDP's position that government always knows best? Sometimes government needs to get involved, as the member from Douglas Park said. Sometimes we need laws; we need laws to protect people. But sometimes we just need to be able to make sure that everything is in place for them on the policy side of things, and we don't need to ram some legislation down their throat, Mr. Speaker.

It's very, very disappointing. I think it's overall arching of the NDP policy is they want to control everything, Mr. Speaker. They want to control the school boards. They want to control the health boards. They want to control everything they possible can and absolutely eliminate any type of free thought amongst the people of Saskatchewan.

The school boards are there for a very specific reason. They're there to look out for the

best needs of their students, primary. Secondly, they're looking out for their staff and they're looking out for their community. And I think the school boards in Saskatchewan are doing a great job at that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think as a government, we need to step out, let them be able to run their school boards.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that this motion that is brought forward is certainly not relevant because it's one of those motions that the NDP are just trying to be able to bring things forward to create some stir within the community. We have policy in place. We've heard from the school boards. We've heard from the gentleman from Regina Pride on that there's no need for legislation.

So I guess the question would be is, who are they consulting, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because they don't seem to be consulting the School Boards Association. They seem to be supportive of this government's line. But they seem to think that they know better than everybody else.

And I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it just goes to speak that the arrogance of the NDP, that they always know better than anybody. The leader stands up and he certainly knows better than all of us. He always seems to think he's the smartest person in the room, but I guess the Saskatchewan people will decide that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for debate has expired. Questions. I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

Ms. Young: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. After listening to my fellow colleagues and members from Saskatchewan Rivers and Regina Douglas Park and Saskatoon Sutherland, I know and I believe that we have across this province dedicated and caring school board trustees who are committed to ensuring that the staff they hire and the governance they provide reflects the respectful, moral, and caring environment to support all the students they serve.

And on April the 28th, 2015, the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] sent a letter, as you heard earlier, to the Minister of Education, stating:

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association firmly believes that our 28 member boards are in the best position to make decisions at the local level, including the establishment of gay-straight alliances. Introducing legislation to make such decisions mandatory limits boards' autonomy and we feel it is unnecessary as school divisions are responding to diverse and changing student needs every day.

Mr. Speaker, does the member from Regina Rosemont oppose the SSBA's request to maintain the autonomy of locally elected school boards?

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: Mr. Speaker, it's pretty rich coming from that government that has actively run roughshod over the autonomy of school boards on front after front after front, Mr. Speaker, to now try to deny human rights of students on those grounds, Mr.

Speaker. School boards have been leaders on this front. Teachers have been leaders on this front, Mr. Speaker. Now it's time for this government to stand up and provide the rights to students that they deserve.

I quote Amanda Guthrie of the Avenue Community Centre on this front. "If that student knows there's provincial legislation backing that request, there isn't going to be as much fear when they ask their principal or teacher for a GSA." Well I think it's our responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to create the culture of care and support, yes, but to enshrine in law the right to GSAs across Saskatchewan.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, right across this country, Ontario, Manitoba, even Alberta under the former premier, Jim Prentice, legislated the opportunity to have GSAs in our schools. That's a reality in Canada.

And we also know the reality for too many teenagers in our schools. They are thinking about suicide because of bullying, particularly homophobic bullying, and that's a reality. And when we have in Saskatchewan . . . We're one of the worst provinces in Canada when it comes to suicide rates. That's a reality. I want to know from the member from Saskatoon Sutherland, what will it take to make GSAs legislation relevant?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Saskatoon Sutherland.

Mr. Merriman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. I guess what I would have to answer, the quick question is, we have made it relevant. We have made it very relevant. We have policy in place. We have approval from the school boards to make sure that they are in line with what we're doing. We're doing our consultation on what is happening within the school systems, and I hear what you're saying is anecdotal about what you're hearing from different people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just don't understand why they think that this is a new issue. Mr. Deputy Speaker, are they over there saying that there was no homophobic slurs before this government, before the Saskatchewan Party formed government? They did absolutely nothing on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They didn't do anything on the bullying. There's been bullying going around forever, and there's been GSA requests for a long time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think that they need to step up to the plate and admit that they failed the people of Saskatchewan back when they were in government.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: The member from Regina Rosemont thinks he knows what school boards want. On November 13th, 2013, the member said, "What this side of the Assembly is simply advocating is that government start listening to the school boards across this province . . ."

Well, Mr. Speaker, this side of the Assembly has listened. Will the member from Regina Rosemont finally acknowledge that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association does

not want legislation?

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: Again, Mr. Speaker, pretty rich from that government that has basically had an agenda that hasn't listened to school boards on so many fronts, that's left school boards with massive shortfalls right now that they're having to deal with, making cuts across our very school divisions here in Regina and Saskatoon, across the province: they better start listening to the school boards on those fronts, Mr. Speaker. School boards in Saskatchewan have been leaders on the front around GSAs. So have teachers. So have students.

Now it's time for that government to show some leadership and enshrine GSAs for all students all across Saskatchewan. And for the member in the back there from Saskatoon Sutherland to suggest that action hasn't been taken on this side, it just shows he has no history or understanding of the leadership in Saskatchewan when it comes to gay marriage, when it comes to the Human Rights Code. And it's just such a dismissive approach, Mr. Speaker, to a very important issue. And to speak about issues as being anecdotal as far as suicide statistics and tragic losses is absolutely unacceptable.

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

Mr. McCall: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In terms of the protestations on the part of this government around there's no need for legislation, it brings to mind the protestations we had heard earlier on in the life of this government around there being no need to enshrine the rights of the transgendered community in the Human Rights Code. Thankfully they came around on that, Mr. Speaker.

I guess when it comes to enshrining the human rights of students to form gay-straight alliances in their schools, again we hear the same kind of protestations we heard around that. But I guess my question is to the member from Saskatoon Sutherland. How long is it going to take for them to come around and do the right thing and enshrine this right in legislation?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Saskatoon Sutherland.

Mr. Merriman: Thank you again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And again a very similar question that I got last time. We do have some policy in place. And more importantly, and I think this letter has been read a couple of times, but I want to take a direct quote out of it:

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association firmly believes that our 28 member boards are in the best position to make decisions at the local level, including the establishment of gay-straight alliance, GSAs. Introducing legislation to make such decisions mandatory limits boards' autonomy and we feel it is unnecessary.

I'm not quite sure what part of that they're not understanding. We've had three members read that from this side. We're more than happy to provide the letter for them so they can

read it and see that this is something that the Saskatchewan school boards are looking for, and what they got from our government. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Moose Jaw North.

Mr. Michelson: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to understand the question that's coming from that side. We know that currently boards of education respect diversity and are committed to providing students with opportunities to connect within their schools. We also know that school divisions in Saskatchewan are ensuring students have a place that are supportive and safe to secure club meetings. That is their policy, and this government stands behind it.

Mr. Speaker, to the member from Saskatoon Centre: do you know of any students that have made a request for a GSA in their school and have been denied?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course. We all do in this legislature because we had Halla Scott come here, and I introduced her to everyone in this House. There's her and several others, Mr. Speaker.

I find this really incredible coming from that member. Last week on April 28th, when we were talking about the Day of Mourning, he was talking about, you know, Saskatchewan has the second-highest injury rate in the country. And he said in the *Times-Herald*, we need stronger occupational health and safety regulations and laws.

The same with this: when we have a situation in our province where we're seeing suicide rates like we have, and there are people out there, kids saying we need strong legislation that allows them to call for GSAs, that should be in place. I find it very odd that he would even have the nerve to get up and talk about it today.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member from Douglas Park gave some examples of certainly good parenting and certainly good judgment as well, and I appreciate that, but it's not an either/or on this front. I mean to compare cancelling a school dance to not providing and enshrining the right to establish a GSA is a very different thing. The fact is, the marginalized and the vulnerable grade 7 or grade 5 or grade 11 or grade 10 students that could be helped by this deserve us, in our positions of strength, to stand up and enshrine the right to a GSA. Why won't the member from Douglas Park support this?

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

Mr. Marchuk: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to take this whole line of questioning from the members opposite really as an affront on several groups. First of all, it's certainly an affront on the autonomy and the integrity of our school divisions. Having been a school board member, Mr. Speaker, I

know and understand and appreciate the dedication and commitment that goes into decision making, and I believe that school . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Members, the time for the 75-minute debate has expired.