

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 23, 2004** **8:00 p.m.**  
 Date: 2004/03/23  
 [Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: **Government Bills and Orders  
 Committee of the Whole**

**The Chair:** Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to some order.

### Bill 22 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004

**The Chair:** On this bill we have at the present moment an amendment, amendment A1. This is an amendment that has been moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Dr. Nicol:** I just wanted to conclude the comments that I was making at 5:30. In a sense, this amendment provides us with an opportunity to go much beyond the scope of revision in our election process that Bill 22 does. In effect, it puts down at the constituent level the power to come back to Albertans and say: "This is the new structure we'd like. This is how we'd like to see our democracy reinvigorated," whatever the appropriate term is.

We had some debate this afternoon about whether or not we should call it democratic renewal or democratic reform. I think the more important thing is that what we've got to do is talk about democratic enhancement, make people feel that it's really part of their process. I'd like to see us support this amendment so that Albertans can choose the aspects of their democratic process they want to discuss and they want to see changes on.

So vote for this amendment and give Albertans that chance to in effect start a dialogue. What they end up with is determined by the wishes and the input of Albertans rather than those of us saying: let's talk about recall or let's talk about proportional representation or let's talk about other things. Let's open the process up. Let's not put those kinds of parameters on it. Let's let Albertans decide through a true citizens' consultation. This amendment provides them with that opportunity, so I hope everybody agrees to support the amendment. Thank you.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mrs. O'Neill:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wish to say a few words with respect to this amendment that has been proposed. I think the proposer of the amendment, while having a very good idea to explore through a committee or a group of people to look at electoral reform, spent all his rational capital when he tried to explain what he envisioned this committee, if you will, or this standing committee would come up with. I think he's quite preemptive and presumptuous, in fact, in deciding what he thought would be the topics discussed by this committee.

My objection to this amendment is that it is a good place but out of time and out of context. Yes, we are dealing with a bill, Bill 22, that suggests electoral reform and amendments to the process which we already have in place. It sharpens, it redefines, and it clarifies, at the request, I might add, of our Chief Electoral Officer, a number of points that we do need to address to make a good system even better.

However, this amendment suggesting that there be the establishment of a standing committee is not appropriately placed, I feel, in this particular act. We have heard suggestions from a number of people. I've had the opportunity to travel on a committee around the

province looking at strengthening Alberta's role in Confederation, and indeed we have heard some suggestions by a number of Albertans who would give this very direction or who would like to see this happen. However, I feel that there is a broader context in which we wish to speak to not only electoral reform but also how we represent ourselves, how we create policy, and how we, of course, as legislators are vested with the mandate to legislate for the people of Alberta by listening to them, by getting direction from them, and by truly representing their positions.

So I'm going to vote against this amendment simply because I think that it has merit, but it has merit in a broader context. When we deal with the issue, we'll have an opportunity to give more timely feedback to us and to Albertans, and we'll create a broader discussion that can ultimately be enacted upon should there be recommendations coming from that committee that would indeed adjust or change the way in which we do perform our elections within this province.

Having said that, I just wanted to say to the House and to the Assembly and also to have on record the fact that while I do believe this is an exercise that has great merit, I would look forward to it, but I do not feel that amending the current bill as we have before us today is either timely or appropriately placed in context. Thank you.

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

**Ms Carlson:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm surprised to hear that the Member for St. Albert is against electoral reform and in particular is against electoral reform as has been put forward by B.C., which is exactly what this amendment has been modelled on.

I was in B.C. last year and was able to participate in the discussions there in the parliamentary conference on this particular issue as B.C. presented the reform that they were going forward with, which is exactly as outlined in this particular amendment. At that stage, they had done the study and the looking at how they wanted to move forward and were at the stage where they had developed the criteria for developing the citizens' assembly and were going out and searching for the people to participate in it.

Since that time, we have seen that B.C. has gotten outstanding reviews on their approach to electoral reform, and they also believe within the government, and even the opposition parties in B.C. are supporting the move, because they see that it is moving forward in an area that is of grave concern to most people and certainly to people in this province if what I've heard on the doors is any judge of what people are thinking.

I would ask the Member for St. Albert where but in a bill that talks about election statutes amendments and the kinds of changes that we need to move forward on now and in the coming years to talk about a citizens' assembly on electoral reform than here. This is in fact the most appropriate place. If we wait until we get all the feedback from that firewall committee and the government decides what they're going to do on it and how much more they're going to study, we're going to waste thousands and thousands and thousands more dollars and be no further ahead than we are right now. People out in the community are desperate for electoral reform. I certainly hear that, and this would definitely move it one step forward.

The member may not like what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar or other members of this Assembly put forward as their suggestions in terms of how that would roll out, but those are merely suggestions, and as we all know, at the end of the day it's the government who decides the structure and the format and how the decisions will be made. I would hope that they would keep an open mind and think about all suggestions that were brought forward.

I am finding it surprising that members of the government are not

supporting this amendment when we have heard for the past decade or more how supportive they are of political reform in general and how I have seen in their election campaigns that that has been a key component of what they promised to the people of this province. So here's a chance to step up to the plate and play, and I would expect that at least some members would be prepared to do that. I certainly am, and I'm certainly prepared to support what I think is a very strong and very good amendment.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat.

8:10

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

**Dr. Massey:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to say a few words in support of amendment A1. I think the world of electoral systems is changing rapidly. If you watch our neighbours to the south, there have been all kinds of innovations in their electoral processes: voting by computer from home – they've been trying to use the Internet in places as a way of encouraging voters to take part in elections, trying to use technology that will make more rapid the results on election night and more accurate results. There are a variety of innovations of electoral schemes being tried elsewhere, and I think the intent of this amendment would be to have Alberta at least look at proposals and then to examine the merits of those proposals.

The outcome, Mr. Chairman, could well be nothing. The committee could meet. They could make their recommendations, and the Legislature, which will have the final say, could decide not to engage in any of the suggestions. So the outcomes I don't think are predetermined. That would be the work of the committee based on proposals that came before it. It's an experiment in democracy, in trying to reform the system that would give an opportunity for all Albertans, all interest groups to put forward their ideas, and hopefully the result would be an improved system or a system that accurately reflects the wishes of the electorate.

I think it's a good amendment, Mr. Chairman. It's nonpartisan in its intent, and the result would be a nonpartisan committee. Eventually the government with its majority would be the one that made the decisions. I think that there's little for the government in terms of risk and much for the province to gain in adopting amendment A1. I support it, and I hope colleagues in the House will do so too.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to spend a few moments talking about this amendment because I think that in substance this amendment is a very intriguing and very interesting approach. Given what we know about what's happening with democratic reform, democratic renewal, or discussion around concerns about how the democratic process in this country might be renewed so that more people would take an interest in governance and the government structures and processes, the concept might well be one that could be embraced in order to see what we might do with respect to the concept of democratic renewal and reform within this province. However, the bill that we have under discussion, Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, is in my view not the place for this amendment.

The Election Statutes Amendment Act is about the instructions for the Chief Electoral Officer with respect to the operations: the running of an election, the rules surrounding elections, what the guidelines for elections are, in fact the set of rules and regulations

and the how-tos with respect to the operation of elections. That's what the Election Act is.

It's not an electoral reform act; it's not about democratic renewal. It's about the chapter and verse of appointing returning officers, appointing executive assistants to returning officers, appointing enumerators, having enumerators getting access to buildings, about candidates getting access to buildings, about how people become candidates, all of those things which are in essence what anybody who is interested in running for an election needs to know and what anybody who is in charge of running an election needs to know. That's what the Election Act is about, Mr. Chairman.

The amendment is about a different topic on the same subject. Obviously, it's about elections, but that's where the similarity between the amendment and the bill that we're debating ends. This is about an entirely different concept and an important concept. B.C. is going through, as we've heard, a process of looking at electoral reform and having a citizens' assembly. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford this afternoon gave a very interesting dissertation on what's happening across the country with respect to the process of examining the way we elect representatives in this country and how we might engage in electoral reform. In fact, we've been, I think, in quite vigorous discussion in this House on this very topic.

So in voting against this amendment, it's not to say that this isn't an important concept or isn't an important idea to carry forward but only to say that it doesn't belong in the Election Act. In fact, I think we would be well advised to consider and watch very carefully what's happening right across this country in five different jurisdictions now, that we know of, that are looking at reforms, and we should learn from them. Although we take great pride in being out front and running strong with respect to many initiatives, we don't always have to be, and when other people have taken the initiative, we ought to learn from them, and we ought to watch what they're doing and see what they are doing right and see what effect they're having.

I think that's a position that we're in right now, where we need to watch and learn. We need to be instructed by what's happening across this country, to participate in the discussion, as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is doing, on national committees, and to proceed carefully into the process of looking at how our democratic institutions can be renewed for the 21st century.

So while I applaud the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing forward this proposed amendment on this very important topic, I would recommend that the House vote against the amendment and that we look forward to how we might participate in the discussion on democratic renewal, which is happening right across this country as we speak.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to briefly comment on amendment A1 to Bill 22 before the House.

It looks to me like the amendment, although it's different from what's in the bill, in no way runs counter to what that kind of bill is supposed to do. What we are trying to do is to change the election statutes of this province for obvious reasons. We want to update, of course, that which presently exists in the form of provincial statutes but to make some departures if necessary.

We are in the 21st century, and we shouldn't shy away from thinking of some new ways about how to not do minor tinkering to improve the existing arrangements but to seek some major improvements in the way we hold elections, in the way we call upon our citizens to express their will, and to present alternatives to them to

seek different electoral systems and make choices between them. There's nothing wrong about offering the citizens of this province choices between different electoral systems, and what this amendment does is provide precisely those kinds of alternatives so that citizens themselves can be empowered to make informed choices.

8:20

I did pay careful attention to the arguments given by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General when he on the one hand said that the ideas contained in this amendment are interesting, that they seem worth our attention, yet argued that they don't belong in this bill. I don't see why or how one could argue that. If there are no formal, procedural problems with introducing this kind of amendment to the bill, then I think it's an appropriate time and opportunity to debate precisely this kind of important change in the bill so that it can provide Albertans with real choices. The fact that some other provinces, at least one province, have undertaken this kind of procedure doesn't mean that we have to wait until they get the results.

What this amendment is asking is that we consult with the citizens, provide citizens the ability to consult with each other and then offer their advice, their recommendations, their alternatives for further action. So I think the amendment is an important one. It deserves the support of every member in this Assembly, and I'm very happy to extend my own support.

When I spoke on this bill, Mr. Chairman, in second reading, I in fact raised the issue of proportional representation as one important alternative that we need to consider. What this amendment will do precisely is create an opportunity and a forum whereby citizens of this province will have an opportunity to look at proportional representation as an alternative to the first past the post kind of arrangement that we presently have in place.

The difficulty with this bill is that it doesn't really offer that kind of opportunity for citizens to make their choices, to at least study carefully those alternatives before making a final choice between either A or B, between the first past the post kind of electoral system, that we have had in this province for the last nearly hundred years – well, we did have, I think, up until the '50s some sort of proportional representation in this province. It's not something new in that sense, but it's a question of re-examining that possibility given that we know the flaws of the first past the post model of elections.

I think it is important. It is incumbent on us, indeed, to provide Albertans with an opportunity to examine carefully, to examine as part of a community forum different choices, and then make recommendations and move on from there to change the elections laws and statutes of this province. So I support this amendment, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

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

**Dr. Massey:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar I would like to move the following amendment: that Bill 22, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, be amended by striking out section 34. We have copies of the amendment for distribution.

**The Chair:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, this amendment will be known as amendment A2.

**Dr. Massey:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Amendment A2 would have us strike out section 34 of Bill 22, which states: section

61(1)(e) is amended by striking out "\$200" and substituting "\$500." The effect of the amendment would be to leave the nomination fee at \$200. The reasons for the amendment, I think, are clear. If the goal is to invite as wide a range of people as possible to take part in the elections and to offer themselves for public service, then any move that makes that more difficult, such as increasing the amount of money that they have to raise, I think is a move in the wrong direction.

I mentioned before, when we were debating this at second reading, Mr. Chairman, that one of the great things about elections in our province is that you can take part in them and be successful without raising huge sums of money. We have, I think, to this point a rather open system with respect to people being able to participate without spending an inordinate amount of time or in some cases what might be an impossible amount of time trying to raise dollars just to take part in the election. The amendments as proposed in Bill 22 I think would be a deterrent for some people and will make it just a little bit harder for everyone that's seeking to run for public office.

One of the things that I think we have created is a culture almost of trying to keep elections affordable, and section 34 moves us in the wrong direction. We would all agree that one of the greatest services that a citizen can provide is to offer himself or herself for public office. In most cases I think it's a mark of a citizen who has great concern for the public good and is willing to sacrifice time and in most cases family and in many cases their occupations to take part in public policy debates and decisions through elected bodies and in this case the Legislature of the province. So we're opposed to anything and any movement that would have the effect of chilling or in any way making individuals feel less likely to offer themselves because of a fee that has to be put up before they can be entered in nomination.

8:30

Now, I realize that a number of people indicated that a \$300 raise is not that much in the scheme of things, but I think that if you look back at the costs of some of the campaigns that were run in the last two or three elections, you will find that the amounts spent by some candidates were very, very modest. They were campaigns where \$500 would have made a difference.

It's for that reason that I urge members of the Assembly to support amendment A2. Thank you.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to amendment A2, that proposes to strike section 34 of Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004. Section 34 of this bill seeks to amend section 61(1)(e) by changing the amount of the election deposit for provincial elections from \$200 to \$500. I'm very pleased to support this amendment. As a matter of fact, my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands had this amendment ready to go forward in his own name.

The reasons for opposing section 34 of Bill 22 and, therefore, seeking to strike that section are as follows. One of the concerns that the New Democrat caucus has is the low level of participation of young people between 18 years and 24 who turned up to vote. This is the age group where no more than 25 per cent of electors or citizens decided to go to the polling booths to vote. We do not want to make changes in our existing statutes which govern election requirements that will further discourage particularly this young group of people.

Increasing the deposit from \$200 to \$500 is a 150 per cent increase in the deposit. Adding another \$300 on top of the \$200 that already exists as a deposit requirement may seem small to us in this

Legislature or to people who are not in this Legislature but are well established and have good incomes, but there are lots of Albertans who are at a stage in life where they don't treat this kind of increase as slight, as something that is not substantial. I think that when they notice this kind of change, when they come to learn about this change, they will say: aha, you see; they don't understand our constraints, the constraints under which we live. I think that they would be discouraged from presenting themselves as candidates in the elections.

Certainly, even in political parties where there may be broader support and, therefore, financial resources for candidates to rely on, there is a problem. Those people who may very well want to run as independents, who don't have the assurance of support from a political party, would find it even harder.

Why would we want to make changes in the existing legislation that would in my view certainly discourage some citizens, particularly those who are of a younger age, those who already find elections either not a matter of interest to them and, therefore, don't turn up even to vote or those who may want to participate but may find that these financial requirements and considerations prevent them from presenting themselves and taking part as candidates in the democratic process, of which elections are a very important element and event?

So let's not make it either an established adult's game or a rich man's game. I think elections are for everyone. Democracy is for everyone, regardless of what our incomes are, regardless of our capacity to pay for various requirements of the Election Act to take part in elections.

I would therefore ask my colleagues in the House to vote for this amendment. If they did, the outcome of that kind of decision would be that we would keep a candidate's nomination deposit at \$200 rather than seeing it increase by 150 per cent, jumping to \$500 for this purpose. So, Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues to give serious thought to supporting the amendment, the point of which is to keep a candidate's deposit at \$200 and not let it go up to \$500.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I understand the logic and the concept being put forward by the hon. members in moving and supporting this proposed amendment. I would point out, as I did at the beginning of the discussion in Committee of the Whole, that the rationale for section 34 that was put forward and was recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer was to expand the purpose for which the deposit was actually in place. The second purpose which is being added here is so that there is an inducement to candidates to comply with the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act by filing their financial statements after the election is done.

I would point out that the argument that section 34 actually increases the deposit and, therefore, could have the effect of denying people the right to run or is a 300 per cent increase is actually fallacious for these reasons. First of all, the deposit that a person might actually lose if they were not successful in obtaining 50 per cent of the winning votes in an election is being increased \$50, not \$300. By that I mean that the deposit is going from \$200 to \$500 under this amendment, but half of that is treated in the same manner as the original deposit under the old act. That is to say that half of that, or \$250, is returned to the candidate if they meet the threshold rules in the same manner as the \$200 deposit was returned under the old act. So the deposit which would be returned to the candidate if they achieved that threshold test is \$250. It used to be \$200. So if they don't achieve the threshold test, the additional cost to the candidate is \$50.

**8:40**

The other \$250: there's no risk, no risk whatever to a candidate. It's completely a hundred per cent refundable to the candidate as soon as they comply with the law and file their financial statement. So this should not be a barrier to any candidate running.

The recommendation from the Chief Electoral Officer is to increase the deposit and put in that second clause. It shouldn't be a barrier because it's only a \$50 additional risk to a candidate. Quite frankly, any candidate getting into a contest and wanting to put forward their views will find many different ways, I'm sure, to do it, but at least some of them are going to cost more than the \$50 increase in the deposit.

I think that the sentiments that are being expressed about making sure that everybody has the right to participate in the process are very noble, but the increase in the deposit, I would submit, is a valid increase and a valid amendment that the Chief Electoral Officer wants for good reasons to make the electoral process function more smoothly. So I would ask members of the House to reject this amendment.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to rise and attempt to improve this bill in some other respects as well. I have an amendment here. I should perhaps read it into the record and then send the original to the table and have it distributed.

**The Chair:** Send us about five copies including the original, please.

**Dr. Pannu:** Okay. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move the following amendment on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands: that Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, be amended in section 8 by striking out clauses (c) and (d) and by striking out section 10. So there are two sections that this amendment proposes to either strike in full or in part.

Reasons in support of proposing this amendment, Mr. Chairman, are quite compelling. Section 8 in clauses (c) and (d) introduces a new kind of requirement, which says that the electoral officer may assign, in respect of each elector whose information is contained in the register, a unique and permanent identifier number consisting of numbers or letters, or a combination of numbers and letters, to be used to assist in distinguishing an elector from another elector or verifying the information about an elector.

So that's clause (c).

In clause (d), Mr. Chairman, Bill 22 reads as follows: in subsection (5) by striking out "and" at the end of clause (c) and repealing clause (f) and substituting the following.

- (f) the unique identifier number assigned under subsection (4.1), and
- (g) any other identification number assigned by other persons who provide information under this section to the Chief Electoral Officer to assist in distinguishing a person from another person or verifying the information about a person.

Now, these are the two clauses of section 8 that the amendment proposes to strike.

I'm going to turn to the reasons because they are compelling, I think, Mr. Chairman. In our judgment, in the judgment of the New Democrat caucus, this kind of assignment of an identifier number would increase the likelihood of a voter being identified not only for strictly election purposes as defined and as seen desirable by the Chief Electoral Officer, but that information could leak out, could in

fact be stolen, or could become public for whatever reasons. If, as I argue, the chances of that happening would increase with the specific permanent identifier number being assigned to individual electors, I think it will discourage more and more people from participating in elections, from turning out on election day, going to the polling station to vote.

So it is this very serious concern that we have heard Albertans express to us with respect to this change that's being proposed by way of Bill 22 that causes us to come forward with this amendment, which would be amendment A3, I think.

The reasons for proposing that section 10 be struck out are identical, the same reasons, because section 10 returns again to the use of the permanent identifier number. I think the allocation of permanent identifier numbers increases the likelihood of the information that must remain confidential remaining confidential. So why increase the risk of violating both the important confidentiality and privacy of individual citizens and electors?

Secondly, why increase this risk if it's likely to mean that it's going to be perceived by our electors, who already have a variety of other reasons not to turn out and go and vote on election day, as yet another reason, which is in my view a very, very appropriate one from their point of view. If it's going to increase the likelihood of their being identified as people who have voted this way or that way, then why even bother participating in the election process?

So it's for those reasons, Mr. Chairman, that I think it would be wise on the part of this Assembly, it'll be appropriate for the members of this House to vote for this amendment. If this amendment is voted in, that will assure voters, citizens that in the judgment of this Assembly there's nothing more important – nothing more sacred, I was going to say – than our commitment to preserving their confidentiality and privacy as they participate in the provincial elections in this province.

So I would urge members to vote for the amendment. Thank you.

8:50

**The Chair:** The hon. member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Ms Carlson:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've thought quite a bit about this particular amendment in terms of whether I should support it or not. On the one hand, I think that at some point in time we have to look at different ways of ensuring that the most number of people are allowed to vote in elections as possibly can, and specifically all of those who wish to vote, whether they are residing at their specific location on the voting day or not, whether they would normally be available during voting hours or not. We have to find some way to facilitate the changes that we've all seen in our own lives in terms of being busier and being more mobile and not always being resident in the area that we are normally assigned to as a main residence.

So, on the one hand, I see the need to move toward some sort of an identifier where we can do different types of voting in the future, perhaps computer voting, perhaps phone voting, whatever. That's a debate that we need to have.

On the other hand, having been elected three times and now having gone through four nominations, I know first-hand the kinds of difficulties that one can encounter with lists. The one thing I do know first-hand to be absolutely true is that if a list can be wrong, it will be wrong. Whether you're using information from a telephone book, as is one of the suggested criteria here in this bill, or, as another criteria, using any other information obtained or available to the Chief Electoral Officer, one of those being conducting a door-to-door enumeration, I know the inherent, built-in inaccuracies of those systems.

In Edmonton in any given constituency the turnover yearly

because of housing prices has been around 25 per cent, so telephone books are between elections practically useless. If you use the federal lists, we've all seen at the federal elections how inaccurate those lists are and the long, long lineups of people who have some inaccurate information attached to their name on that particular list. I have helped to co-ordinate door-to-door enumerations in the past and have seen the errata sheets that fall out of those. The kinds of problems associated with getting accurate information at the door is also a huge problem.

So when we take a look at this bill and we understand the kinds of inaccuracies that are inherent in the existing databases that we have and we go to section 11, distribution of lists of electors, 18(1)(c) and then subsections (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) on page 5, you'll see the number of potential inaccuracies that there are.

We've seen it. We've seen every time I've had to use a list that in transcribing, the residential address becomes wrong; the postal code becomes wrong, the mailing address. The surname can be typed in wrong. The given name and middle initials can be typed in wrong. The telephone number of the person can be typed in wrong. The gender of the person can be inaccurately entered. The year of birth can be inaccurately recorded. Imagine the kinds of people who could be disallowed from voting if they go with their identifier number and it doesn't add up to the information that's on the list. I just see too many problems.

Until we can get the issues ironed out of how to correctly identify people and record accurate information about them and then keep that information accurate given the kinds of mobility that people have these days, I'm not going to support any identifier mark. I asked this question the other night – I got some answers from the Minister of Justice on it, which were very helpful but not as complete, I don't think, as I need – in terms of future uses of this. Until we actually see that this government or any other government can actually protect the privacy of people, I'm not in favour of identifier markers being given to people for any purposes, including this one.

I would hope that my mind could be changed in the coming years, Mr. Chairman, because I think that likely this is the way we will be going in the future, but I'm not convinced at this stage that the information will be accurate enough. We haven't heard what an acceptable error margin is for these lists and how they expect to correct the problems that are definitely going to occur, not possibly occur but will definitely occur.

Until I have those answers and until I have more confidence in a system that can track people accurately and protect their privacy accurately, then I can't support this part of the bill, so I will in fact be supporting this particular amendment.

**The Chair:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was most disappointed to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie because in listening to what she had to say, I thought that she was creating all of the arguments why she would be supporting the concept of the unique identifier number and not voting for the amendment, and then she ended up in a sprint of twisted logic reversing her logic and rationale to arrive at the wrong conclusion.

In fact, the concept of the unique identifier number, again I hasten to add, is not an invention of mine as sponsor of the bill or of the government as sponsor of the bill, keeping in mind that the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of the Legislature and operates from the direction of the Legislature through its Legislative Offices Committee. The request came forward for the concept of including

the unique identifier number precisely to deal with the issues that the hon. member was talking about, and that is to make sure that you can have a unique file on each individual for the purposes only of having accurate elections lists and not confusing people who may have the same name who perhaps even live at the same address or have the same name and live at different addresses.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was actually going through exactly the process that I thought would lead her to say that we ought not to support the amendment. That is to say that having gone through elections and having gone through nominations and knowing the processes that worked, although these lists wouldn't be available for nominations – I would hasten to add that these are for election lists. But having gone through the nomination process, she knows probably as well as anybody in this House how lists of electors are compiled and how they can be confusing when there's more than one person of the same name and certainly more than one person of the same name even at a certain address. It's very, very difficult to ascertain first of all whether the people on the list are eligible to vote and whether the right person is intending to vote and whether that person has voted.

What we ought to be doing, in my humble submission, is letting the Chief Electoral Officer have all the appropriate tools that he needs to make sure that the election lists are full, complete, that he can keep accurate information, that he can keep track of a very mobile population for the purposes of making sure that election lists are full, complete, and accurate and that he doesn't lose information that he should be keeping on a particular individual.

Now, this is a unique situation, Mr. Chairman, in that I don't think there are very many people in the House who believe that governments of any nature should keep files on citizens. To the extent possible citizens' information should be their own, and information should only be collected for appropriate purposes and only used for the purposes for which it's collected. I think we would all share that view in this House. I know that past members of the Liberal opposition, one that I met this weekend who is now the Privacy Commissioner of Saskatchewan, were strong advocates for the privacy of personal information. And in this House we passed the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. There's a strong adherence to the concept that we should not be collecting information that we don't need as a government and that when information is collected, it only should be used for the purposes for which it was collected and those sorts of things.

But the Chief Electoral Officer situation is different in that first of all he's not government; he's an officer of the Legislature. Secondly, it's his job to collect information about an individual to ascertain whether or not they are eligible electors and, having collected that information, to create an electors list and to make sure it's accurate and to make sure that all electors who are eligible to be on that list are on that list and to keep track of that information. As we have a growing population and as we have a mobile population, that's a more and more difficult job.

He has requested one simple tool to allow him to do that job. That simple tool is to be able to take an individual's file, however he keeps it, presumably electronically, and attach a unique identifier number which would be that person's number. He doesn't want to use their social insurance number. He doesn't want to use any other number. He wants to be able to create a file number which he can then use to track that individual and to keep that individual's information and move it to whatever polling district it ought to be in when that person moves, to identify which John Smith it is that's moving, those sorts of pieces of information.

9:00

There's nothing sinister about this. There's nothing big govern-

ment or Big Brother about this. There's nothing in this which portends or suggests that anybody is going to a new system of voting. There's been no suggestion of new systems of voting. In fact, I indicated earlier in response to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie's comments on second reading that that was specifically not the situation. I again, at the beginning of the Committee of the Whole today, indicated that I had gone back and reconfirmed and had been advised that in fact there's no consideration at this time with Internet or on-line voting or any of those other things.

It's simply an administrative, an internal process to help ensure the accuracy of the list of registered voters, something which I think all Albertans have an inherent interest in being done properly, something the Chief Electoral Officer has said will help him in that task, a tool that we ought to allow him to have. So I'd ask members to vote against the amendment.

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

**Ms Carlson:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have two questions for the Minister of Justice on this amendment and the information that he just shared with us. One is that you haven't answered the question of how you expect to be able to protect the integrity of these numbers. Electronic information is not safe. We don't have the kinds of safeguards available, I don't believe, at this time to protect the personal information. So that's one question.

The second question that you haven't answered is: how are they going to correct the errors, and what percentage of errors do we anticipate there to be from these lists? They are not going to be foolproof, and we need to know for those people who have got some error attached to their identifier that there's a process where they can still vote and have that information corrected in a timely fashion.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Chairman, as I've indicated on at least two other occasions in debate on this bill, first of all, the unique identifier number has nothing to do with the elector's ability to vote. They're either on the voters list, or they're not on the voters list. If they're not on the voters list, they get to be put on the voters list in accordance with the provisions of the Election Act, which allows the person to become a voter. The fact that they have or don't have the unique identifier number, which allows the Chief Electoral Officer for his own purposes to determine where that file goes and to take information with that that's attached to that number to different places in his database, has nothing to do with the eligibility of a person to vote.

Now, if a person's information is incorrect in the Chief Electoral Officer's database with respect to the election records, again that has nothing to do with whether there's a number attached or not attached. If their information is incorrect, it needs to be corrected, and it's corrected in the same manner as it is now under the Election Act. Nothing changes. In other words, they can be enumerated. If they're already on the list because the Chief Electoral Officer has obtained their information from some other source, then they would be asked, when the enumerations happen, to verify the information, and those corrections can be made at that time. They can examine the election list.

The indication to me was that the unique identifier number wouldn't be a public number on the voters list. I'm not sure of that. But even if it is, it is just one more piece of information which is of no value or interest to anyone else other than the Chief Electoral Officer so that he can tag his file to the number, and when he gets an indication that John Smith has moved from Edmonton-Whitemud to Edmonton-Ellerslie, he can take that package of information over to the other place.

We're in an electronic age. We have new ways of moving data and keeping data and holding files. It used to be a filing cabinet with a file and a list. Now it's a computer. The fact that they use computers and the question of whether the computer is secure or nonsecure has nothing to do with whether there's a unique identifier number attached. It's either secure or nonsecure, and with or without this unique identifier number the same concerns that the hon. member raises will be there. So I'm not sure I understand the concern that's being raised with respect to a simple administrative tool that the Chief Electoral Officer has asked for, what the possible concern with that might be.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chairman. I can't explain it any more clearly. I'm not inventing this. It's a request that we've had, and as I'm told and as I've tried to put forward to the House, this unique identifier number will simply be there, attached to an elector when they're enumerated or when they're put on the list for the first time. When that elector moves or changes in some way, that identifier number will be the way that the Chief Electoral Officer moves them through the system. But the system will exist with or without the unique identifier number.

**Dr. Nicol:** Mr. Chairman, I have a question on that explanation. So the individuals will have their unique identifier number so that if they move, they go in and they trigger their own identification with that unique identification number. That's when the Chief Electoral Officer grabs hold of this part of the data sent from Edmonton-Ellerslie, I think was the example you used, and moves it over to Edmonton-Mill Woods. Is that how you explained it? What if the individual does not know their unique identifier number? How do they go about clarifying that this name, et cetera, is to be removed from this section and put in that section? This is a whole process that I see really has a lot of potential but also needs a little bit of understanding as we go through this, because it's quite easy for people to move around and end up being on this continual voter list that we're trying to develop without ever being taken off in an old location.

I can give an example, Mr. Chairman. I register always in Lethbridge, yet when I came up here to my apartment, at the last election here was a little form underneath the door saying: please register. I was called three times asking why I hadn't registered, yet I was registered in Lethbridge. So, you know, what do we do with that kind of a situation? Would I have to put my unique number on here so that they could check and say: "Whoops. Sorry, Ken. You're already registered in Lethbridge"? That's the kind of, I guess, usefulness that we could see for this kind of number, but unless the individual who has the number is forthcoming, what value is it? If I don't put the number on it when I'm in Edmonton, they just have to assume that it's a different individual with the same name because that doesn't work.

It's quite possible to have the same name. I lived in an apartment building in the United States when I was in school, and I kept getting mail for a Ken Nicol in the next apartment building, at 214 instead of 216. I went over there one day, and yes, there was an individual there with exactly the same name, spelled exactly the same way. How do we differentiate those kinds of things?

So this is the kind of thing that if we're going to have those numbers, that helps, but also if we don't each take the responsibility to identify ourselves with that number when we do move an address, how do we keep the records clean? All we've done is created more confusion because there's an expectation of that clean record, but there's no mechanism to carry it through. So I would like to have an explanation on that if possible.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to be really frank and say that I don't have the slightest idea how the Chief Electoral Officer is going to implement the use of the unique identifier number. What I do know is that the Chief Electoral Officer is a well-respected, highly paid individual. I hope he's highly paid. I really don't know how much he's paid. I shouldn't say highly paid; I have no idea how much we pay him. But he's an officer of the Legislature, and we task him to run elections, and we task him to tell us what tools he needs to run elections, what structures he needs to run elections, and what things will make his job easier so that he can make sure we have fair and impartial elections in this province. One of the things he said that would make his life easier is if he had a unique identifier number that he could attach to electors' names so that he could determine one elector from another if they had the same names or if they moved from electoral district to electoral district.

I've got a job to do. I'm a legislator. I'm Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and I'm on a number of various committees, and we set policy. One of the things I don't do is interfere in the management of my department. We hire deputy ministers to do that. One of the things that I should not and cannot do is interfere in the operations of the Chief Electoral Officer. So when he comes and says: here are some things that we ought to do to make the Election Act work better and here are some details – it's one of the few acts that has this kind of detail, one of the few acts that specifies with such degree of codification exactly what happens, whether he can hire an executive assistant. There's good reason for that, I'm sure. One of those good reasons is that people ought to know with a great deal of clarity exactly what the election rules are.

I can't answer the question of what precisely a unique identifier number is. But because I can't answer that question precisely is not a good reason not to trust the Chief Electoral Officer when he says that it would be a very good tool for him to use in making sure that we have accurate election lists. So once again I would ask the people to take his advice and defeat the amendment because it's not a sinister object, it's not another way of turning Albertans into numbers, it's not another way of collecting personal information that the Chief Electoral Officer or government ought not to have; it's simply to be used by the Chief Electoral Officer as a way of keeping the election list straight.

9:10

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I find the debate to the amendment that I moved very, very interesting. One learns more as one listens to every bit of statement that's made.

No one is suggesting that the Chief Electoral Officer's credentials are in question. We have before us a piece of legislation that's come to us as a piece of legislation. We have to make a judgment on it. Our Chief Electoral Officer has made a recommendation. It's our job when that recommendation takes the form of a piece of legislation to examine it carefully and ask questions that are pertinent in our view to the change that's being proposed.

The Minister of Justice has acknowledged himself that he doesn't exactly know the reasons and the various uses that the Chief Electoral Officer wants to put this information to or may choose to put this information to. So since he doesn't know, does he want us to use that as a good enough basis to vote for the proposed legislation?

We are asking serious questions about serious changes that are being proposed. I'm sure the Chief Electoral Officer would not have asked for this change unless he had very strong reasons. The

minister has not been able to spell those reasons out for us. On the other hand, we have raised some important, pertinent, serious questions about what this particular section proposes to achieve and do.

If we don't have the reasons that are persuasive enough and the minister can't provide those reasons, then it's too bad. I have sympathy with him. We're not asking him to interfere in the Chief Electoral Officer's decisions; we're asking him to shepherd this legislation through this Assembly by offering clear, persuasive arguments. He has failed to do that, so I suggest to you, respectfully, Mr. Chairman, that the Assembly ignore the appeal and the basis on which the appeal has been made, that we trust someone else. I think we have to trust our own collective judgment in this House.

So I ask members to vote for the amendment. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Chairman, I've got one more amendment here that I'd like to move on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands. With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands that Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, be amended by striking out section 90.

**The Chair:** You have moved amendment A4; have you?

**Dr. Pannu:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll just wait a moment until a few people get a copy of it.

**Dr. Pannu:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Section 90 of Bill 22, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, increases the amount of contributions that can be made under the Election Act by individual persons, corporations, trade unions, employee organizations to registered parties and to candidates. The existing legislation puts those limits for contributions to constituency associations at \$750 to any registered constituency association and \$3,750 in the aggregate to the constituency associations of each registered party.

Section 90(1)(a)(ii) increases the limits from \$750 to \$1,000 and from \$3,750 to \$5,000 in the case of a registered constituency association and a registered constituency association of each registered party respectively. It also increases the ceiling from \$1,500 to any registered candidate and \$7,500 in the aggregate to the registered candidates of each registered party. These numbers are changed to \$2,000 to any registered candidate and \$10,000 in the aggregate to the registered candidates of each registered party.

It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that these increases would make the playing field even more uneven than it is presently. We have information provided by the Chief Electoral Officer's office over the previous elections which clearly indicates that the parties in this House do not receive the corporate or individual donations and contributions in amounts that in any way look similar, thereby making it a very uneven contest based on just the amount of money that's available.

9:20

Certainly, the Progressive Conservative Party is the prime beneficiary of the existing arrangements. The new arrangements that are being proposed by way of this bill in section 90 would increase that advantage very unfairly to the Progressive Conservative Party at the expense of the competitiveness of the elections process. After all, it's the funds that make the election machines go, and given our

knowledge of how the contributions in this province work with respect to party in power and parties in opposition, I submit that the considerable increases in the ceilings with respect to both contributions to candidates and political parties for election purposes will simply make that situation much worse.

So for that reason, I am happy that we have brought this amendment before the House and, certainly, would like to ask other members to support this amendment so that the proposed change is struck out, thereby keeping the existing levels of contributions where they are now, thereby preventing further inequality in the monies received for election purposes by the political parties in this province as they enter the election period.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

**Ms Carlson:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is another amendment that I'm definitely supporting. It's always struck me how easy it is for government members to raise money and how tough it is for opposition parties to do the same. Here we see in this particular Election Act the government moving forward to make their job even easier in terms of what the limits are for fundraising.

I would be much happier if we set a spending limit for elections that would allow more people to participate in the process rather than fewer. This truly does become an old white man's game at some stage because that's who traditionally has the most access to money. That's a process that needs to be stopped, not enhanced or promoted, and that's what we see through this act: limits just get higher.

I don't ever want to see us go to an American-style model, where you can't even start a nomination campaign if you don't have access to a hundred thousand dollars or more and then talk about election campaigns that are in the hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. That doesn't allow people to be a part of the process.

It should be a duty for all of us who have been in this system to promote greater numbers of people to run regardless of the political background that they come from because that is where we will get the best government, and that is where we will get the most representative government: from a greater number of people participating in the process. When we see campaign donation limits being increased as they are in this particular act, we see people distancing themselves once again from politics and politicians. What does a person have in common with people who are going to be spending \$2,000 or \$10,000 or \$1,000 or \$5,000 or \$15,000 on campaigns? Very little if anything at all.

This does nothing to help us move towards solving the problem of a new age group of completely disenfranchised voters, Mr. Chairman, and I'm talking about young people. When we take a look at those who are under the age of 30, what we see now is that huge numbers of them don't vote. In fact, seldom do more than 30 per cent of them vote. Why is that? They're disenfranchised for a number of reasons, and not the least of those is how they see these big-money campaigns rolling out. This particular act facilitates that. The amendment attempts to correct that by striking out section 90.

When we see the kinds of dollars that are being increased here, potentially you can spend about \$5,000 more in any particular campaign through the various categories. Candidates, constituency associations, the party system itself: all of these things are being changed now. The limits change during the writ time, so people can give increased limits to a constituency or to an aggregate of a number of constituencies.

For the individuals the only thing that doesn't change is how much can be given to each registered party. I think people would be

surprised to learn that the amount of money that companies can give to registered parties now is \$15,000 a year. It's a huge amount of money, and it's enough to directly influence some parties and some candidates. That's exactly what we have to get away from.

I'm supporting the federal changes that have been made, which put caps on how much money companies and individuals can give to parties, to associations, and to individuals. The federal changes have completely reversed, flipped, how money can be spent. Now the limit is \$1,000 for corporations not just to a candidate but during a whole election period.

So that's very interesting, Mr. Chairman, because under these changes not only can you give \$2,000 to candidate A, but you can also give it to candidate B and C and D and E and F if that's where your pocketbook will stretch if you're a company or an individual. Under the federal rules that amount is capped at \$1,000 total, so if you want to give it to all those candidates, you've got to split that \$1,000 up between all of them. That means you have very little influence on decisions that that candidate, if successfully elected, will be making in the future. That's the way politics should be run. That is not the way this government is going in terms of how we see the increased limits happening here. I can't support that, Mr. Chairman. So I'm very happy to see this particular amendment come forward.

In fact, I think that just striking it out isn't enough. I would like to see an amendment come after this that reduces all of those limits. Let's see how that looks for more people being able to get involved in the process because many people now, particularly women, Mr. Chairman, are unable to run because they simply can't raise the money.

I'd like to speak for a moment about a club that we organized some years ago to address this particular situation. Fifteen years ago two people were very concerned in the Edmonton area about policy resolutions not being supported that directly impacted women. So those two people started a club here in Edmonton called the Edmonton women's policy association. That club was a subgroup of the Liberal Women's Commission. The Liberal Women's Commission is a commission for all women who are members at either the federal or the provincial level. You automatically become a member, if you want to be, when you buy a Liberal membership. Under that commission clubs can be formed for specific objectives.

This club was initially formed 15 years ago to bring forward policy resolutions at conventions that were particularly important to women. They dealt with all kinds of issues: lots on the social side, lots on the protection side, and a lot of them dealing with justice issues. That club formed 15 years ago, and I joined that club 14 years ago. As soon as I heard about it and saw the kind of work it was doing, I joined it.

What we found after going through a couple of conventions at both the federal and the provincial level is that you could get the resolution on the floor, you could get the resolution passed, but until you could get the politicians sitting at the table to act on it, it never had any effect at either the federal or the provincial level. Then what we realized was that not only do we have to develop good policy resolutions, but we have to elect women as politicians so that we have our voice at that table helping to make those decisions. So we went out and started to form SWAT teams that would go out and work for different candidates who supported our particular mandate. What we found was that primarily those were female candidates, and what we found then was that there weren't very many female candidates around.

9:30

So we started to develop some research into why that was. One of

the primary reasons for that was that those women couldn't raise any money, Mr. Chairman. They just didn't have access to resources the same way that male candidates did. At that time, then, the club decided that, well, in order to get these great policy resolutions put forward that we're developing and in order to support the women candidates in ridings where they actually have a chance to win, we better start raising some money for them, because that's the final barrier for them to get there.

Twelve years ago we started having an annual brunch on International Women's Day, a very significant day for women across this country and an excellent time to get people together in a venue where we could promote issues that were important to women across this country and bring in keynote speakers that identified with the issues and would support them and promote them and also at the same time provide the fellowship of having women with like-minded ideas getting together and giving them a chance to get to know each other and talk and look for issues for them to support, to listen to the keynote speaker, and also be able to raise some funds. We've always kept the ticket prices reasonable so that more women than less could come, and we've always encouraged people who couldn't attend to donate their tickets so that those who couldn't afford to come could also be able to come.

Now, keynote speakers over the years, Mr. Chairman, have been very varied. They've been federal and provincial politicians, they've been male and female, and they've come forward and talked about a variety of issues that are very important to us, not the least of which are some of the barriers that women face in politics and how in many ways we've seen some changes over the past 15 years, but in many ways we also haven't.

It was my great privilege this past International Women's Day to be the keynote speaker, Mr. Chairman. That was a real honour because I've seen that club grow, and in fact it's grown and developed in parallel to my own political career. So it was a real honour for me to be this year's keynote speaker. What I did talk about was the women in politics who have been mentors and role models and some of the great things that we have learned about politics and running but some of the barriers that are still out there. So it was very nice to be able to get up and speak. We had about 350 women at that particular brunch. I think the biggest selling brunch that we have had was when Paul Martin came to speak. That was prior to him being Prime Minister, and at that brunch we sold about 750 tickets.

What happens with that money is that the club puts it into an investment plan, and we keep the money separated for federal and provincial candidates. When the elections are called, then we take that money out and divide it amongst those women in Edmonton and the Edmonton area that are running and deliver it to them the day the writ is dropped. That's a very significant day for us to deliver that money, Mr. Chairman, because, as we who have run in campaigns all know, most of your expenses in a campaign are up front. We know that we have to pay the rent, we have to install the telephones, we have to pay the deposits, we have to order a brochure, we've got to get those signs up there, and those are all upfront costs.

So it's very significant for members of the club to be able to walk into a woman's campaign office on day one and hand them a cheque. Traditionally for provincial politicians it's been around \$800 because at the provincial level we have more women running than at the federal level. Traditionally at the federal level it's been about \$2,000 per candidate because there are fewer running. That's a significant amount of money, Mr. Chairman, and it is very much appreciated by those women who are candidates and by those who are operating their campaign offices.

One of the ways that we've been able to promote and support

women candidates over the years is through this club. It's now in its 15th year. It is the only fundraising event that is held annually on International Women's Day in the federal party, and it is widely recognized. The model is looked at by many different associations across the province, but none have been able to duplicate it to this stage.

I have to say that the core group of women that organize this club is about 15 people. They work very hard, and they work tirelessly. But when elections come, the club attracts many more people, 200 to 300 volunteers who form the SWAT teams and go out and telephone and door-knock and otherwise help people run their campaigns.

I have to say that I have had the good fortune of having executive members of that club run all of my campaigns, Mr. Chairman, whether they've been nominations or elections. We've had key people in that group come out and devote their time to my campaigns, and as a result I believe I've been successful because of their assistance. In fact, in this upcoming campaign my nomination chair is a past president of the club and my campaign chairman is a past president of the club, and they're all still actively involved.

We're now at the stage where we're mentoring young women to come in and take the reins of leadership and raise the bar for us in terms of the next level that we get involved in. So that's been an amazing process to be involved in.

**Mr. Hancock:** A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order I can only guess.

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On relevance. I've been listening intently on this women's policy club. I think I've heard about the executive for the last 15 years and the value of the policy club and all that sort of thing, but I haven't heard one iota about the amendment, which is about not raising the fundraising limits. I heard "fundraising" a couple of times, but that's about as close as she got.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on the purported point of order.

**Ms Carlson:** Mr. Chairman, it's too bad that the minister only started listening halfway through, because certainly I did talk specifically to this amendment and to the changes it's making in fundraising and about how it's relevant for people who can't raise the money, which is the real problem with the changes in this act as it stands. If he would just have a little patience and let me finish, I would conclude by talking about those specifics as well.

**The Chair:** Well, as they say, coincidence and convergent thought. The chair has been wondering how this was relevant to A4, and I'm glad you've explained that to us right now. Truthfully, the earlier part certainly was dealing with the material of section 90. It's all very interesting about the club, but if you could sort of bring that back to the essence of amendment A4, that would be helpful, I think.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Ms Carlson:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. While I would like to talk at greater length building my case about the club and why it is replacing some of the discriminatory practices that we would

otherwise see attached to women candidates and their inability to raise funds, I will return directly to how the problem is perhaps not understood by government members, who want to oppose this amendment.

By raising the limits that any particular individual or company can spend on a campaign, we disenfranchise many people, and particularly we disenfranchise those people who otherwise have a hard time raising money. Those, as I said, Mr. Chairman, are primarily women or fringe candidates who don't have parties of recognition behind them. We have found in our party ways to try and mitigate those problems by the fundraising through the club and other kinds of sources, but it only hurts us even more and once again hurts us if we raise the limits for the fundraising in this particular instance.

So I once again say that I support this amendment. I do not like the part of the act as the changes are implied here. I urge all members of this Assembly, and particularly all members of this Assembly who support women moving forward in politics, to support the amendment.

**9:40**

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

**Dr. Massey:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words about the amendment with respect to section 90. The increases are \$500 for a candidate, \$2500 for candidates, from \$750 to \$1,000 for a constituency association, and from \$3,750 to \$5,000 for constituency associations. The donations to parties remain the same as they were previously, at \$15,000.

Campaign contributions have always been a source of controversy and concern. I think that it's fair to say that in our province there's been increasing concern over special interests and funding candidates at election time and the role that money plays in decision-making in the province. We propose, for instance, a lobbyist registration so that the kinds of inferences that are affecting politicians in the province are transparent and up front for everyone to see. Our caucus believes that changes to the act should have been brought forward. Our present policy would ask that individuals, corporations, and unions could donate more than \$5,000 a year. That's the policy as it's outlined by our party at the present time.

So I think clearly the thrust is to reduce the amount of money that can be donated. At the same time, we have suggested that the amount of money for constituencies would not change. We've also indicated that the money for the donations to individual candidates would not change. So the amendment is more consistent with what we have proposed as a party, and the proposals in the bill move in a direction quite opposite from what we think is healthy for election financing in the province.

The same arguments, I think, may be used for this section as were used in trying to argue against the increase in the amount of money that people are required to put down for nominations. I think we are wise to promote and to try to foster a political culture where big money and big dollars don't become a major influence in campaigns and in the election of people to the Legislature. The danger of that, I think, is all too well apparent from campaigns south of the border and the amounts of money required to run for political office in some jurisdictions. Some positions in the States, people elected to decide public business, have turned those elected officials into full-time campaign money raisers, and it certainly has distorted the whole political process.

These numbers in section 90 are certainly not of the same magnitude as some of those south of the border, but they are moving in that direction when we start increasing the amounts, even as modest as some of these increases are. I think that it was wise to

leave the donations to a political party at \$15,000. It's the only sum that hasn't been changed in the act, but the others are creeping up, and it's that kind of creep that will eventually see us, I think, regretting that we didn't see fit to put the brakes on the increases when they came forward, as they have in Bill 22.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I would urge members of the Assembly to support the amendment and to ensure that campaign financing remains much as it is. Thank you.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to conclude debate.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to just add a few comments in support of the amendment. When speaking on this bill at second reading, I drew the attention of the House to the direction in which the federal legislation has moved relative to the ability of parties and candidates to raise funds.

It's refreshing to note that all of the parties represented in the House of Commons agreed some time ago to reduce political party dependence on big money – big organizations, corporations, labour unions, and others – and felt that it will greatly serve the democratic process to make election campaigns undertaken by political parties independent of big corporate donations, labour union donations, and will free political parties from the need to depend on big money, whether it's coming from individuals or groups or corporations.

So we have now national legislation which enables elections run by registered political parties to be funded from public funds, thereby freeing all political parties from undue possible influence by powerful players, be they banks, be they corporations, be they labour unions or other groups. This, I think, is a very desirable kind of development at the federal level, and one would hope that we would move in a similar direction if we agree that independence of political parties from special interests and powerful entities or groups is important for the health of democracy in our province and in our country.

That's not what this bill tries to do. Particularly section 90 of this bill, Mr. Chairman, in fact entrenches further the ability of special interest groups, corporations, rich and wealthy individuals or other special interest groups to be able to fund the elections by selecting a party of their choice in a way which I think is detrimental to the health of the electoral process and certainly to the health of democratic processes in this province.

9:50

I would hope that we don't want to increase the influence of and don't increase the dependence on special powerful interests by making changes in the elections statutes which will further strengthen the ability of special interests and powerful groups to influence election outcomes or election campaigns because they have the ability through large amounts to fund campaigns to influence the election outcomes.

That's why this amendment is so important, and that's why section 90 of this bill is a matter of such grave concern not only to me, not only to members of the opposition parties in general but to citizens, and citizens are becoming very cynical about the fact that election campaigns can be bought and can be influenced in very consequential ways simply with the power of money that corporations or special interest groups can throw at election time in the direction of political parties of their choice, and we know which political party is their first choice in this province. That's very clear from the official records in this province. It's the party in power. The Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta is the greatest beneficiary of such big donations coming from a very small number of powerful

special interests, sometimes big money, sometimes corporations, sometimes other organized groups.

So it is for that reason, Mr. Chairman, that the New Democrat caucus has been very happy to move this amendment which will strike section 90 so that we maintain whatever balance there is in the existing legislation. In fact, I urge all parties in this House to move towards taking steps similar to the ones that all parties in the House of Commons have agreed to take to reduce the dependence of political parties on these big donors and big donations and provide public assistance which is fair and appropriate for us to run our elections.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just briefly with respect to the amendment. The amendment, as we've heard, proposes to delete section 90 of Bill 22 and by doing so would then leave the act as it is. So with respect to contributions to registered constituency associations and registered candidates the limits would be as in the existing act.

Now, the existing act was passed, as far as I can recall, in 1980, and there's been no change to those limits since 1980. The changes that are being proposed here are relatively modest. They're a 33 per cent increase in the amounts, from \$750 to \$1,000 in one case and from \$3,750 to \$5,000 in another, relatively modest in amount given that it's been that since 1980, which by my calculation in math is about 24 years, so I don't think it's untoward to increase those limits.

I think it behooves us to point out that no increase has been made to the limit of \$15,000 to each registered party. That's been kept the same, so I think the protests about how it affects those in government as opposed to those who are in opposition or otherwise are really a bit of a stretch. The bottom line is that every now and then you have to revisit and modernize legislation. You have to keep it current. You have to take a look at it, and in this case, where the limits were set some 24 years ago, it's not untoward to revisit those limits and put in a relatively small increase given the period of time over which this stretches.

I would suggest that there's nothing nefarious or untoward about section 90 as it's proposed in the act. In fact, it's quite reasonable. It doesn't move it to unrealistic limits. It doesn't go any further than simply making those changes.

Quite frankly, I think that there's another good reason not to adopt this amendment, and that, I believe, is that it's not quite so simple as simply to make that amendment. There also would have to be corollary amendments made with respect to the receipt side. In the member's haste to deal with this, unless he maybe has some other separate amendments that he intends to bring forward to deal with the other portions of it after this particular amendment has been passed, he's missed out the corollary amendments which would be necessary to make this amendment effective.

So in its current form, certainly, and also because of its substance I think the House should deny this amendment.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

**The Chair:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've had a wonderful day of debate on elections. I think it's been enervating for all of us, and it probably behooves us to go home and reflect on the wonderful debates, so I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 24 and report progress on Bill 22.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

**Ms Graham:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports Bill 24. The committee also reports progress on Bill 22. At this time I would like to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.  
The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:59 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]